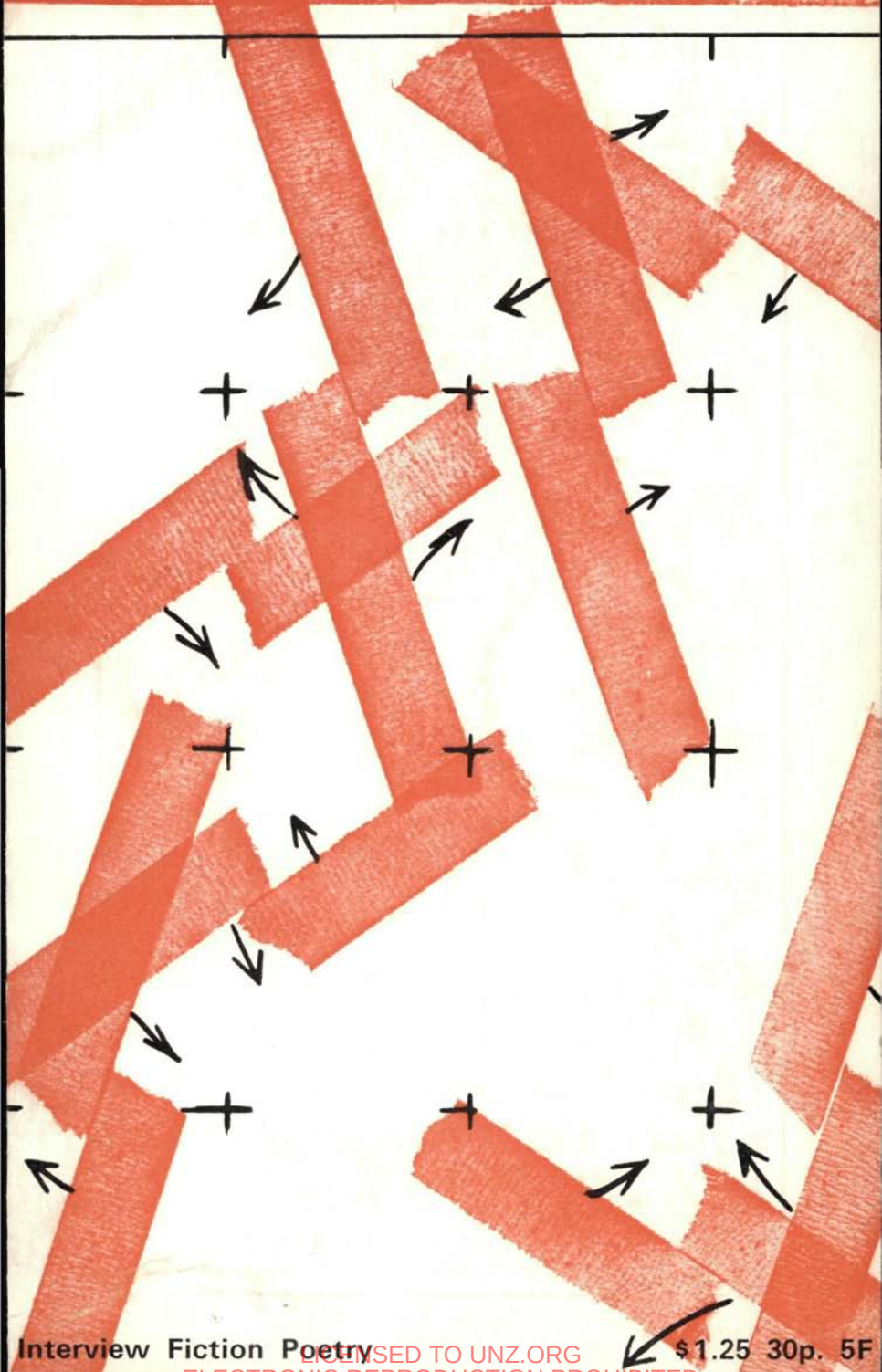
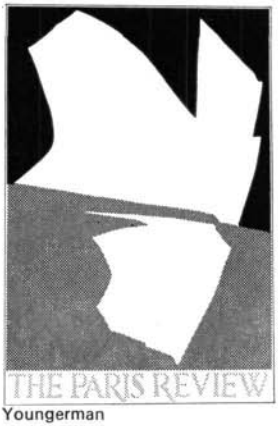
THE PARIS REVIEW



Interview Fiction Poetry $1.25 30p. 5F

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paris review posters
by american artists



Youngerman

Lichtenstein

D'Arcangelo Poleskie Wilson	$35
Dine Frankenthaler Freilicher Indiana Katz Marca-Relli Oldenburg Ortman Stamos Vicente Wesley	$50
Chryssa Glaser Lichtenstein (no longer available) Nevelson Rivers Rosenquist Summers Trova Ungerer Warhol	$75
Anuszkiewicz Kelly Krushenick Lindner Marisol Motherwell Youngerman	$125
Rauschenberg Shahn Steinberg (available only with purchase of complete set)	$200

signed & numbered editions of 150

write for illustrated brochure:
The Paris Review 45-39 171 Place Flushing, NY 11358

posters are also available from:
Poster Originals, Ltd. 16 East 78 Street NYC
Harcus-Krakow Gallery 167 Newbury Street Boston, Mass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARIS REVIEW EDITIONS

James Salter **A Sport and a Pastime** $3.00
Dallas Wiebe **Skyblue the Badass** $3.00
Louis Zukofsky **"A" 1-12** $3.00
Rene-Victor Pilhes **La Rhubarbe** $3.00

Send order blank with payment to:

The Paris Review
45-39 171 Place
Flushing, New York 11358

I would like to order the following book(s):

____ A Sport and a Pastime

____ Skyblue the Badass

____ "A" 1-12

____ La Rhubarbe

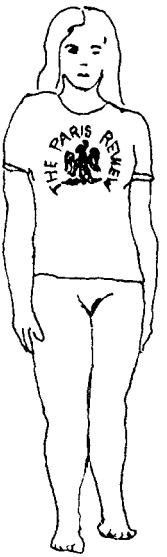
Payment of ____ is enclosed.
Send book(s) to:

name _____

address _____

_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



SWEATSHIRTS AND TEE SHIRTS WITH THE PARIS REVIEW EMBLEM

SWEATSHIRTS:	Black on White or on Black (S-M-L)	White $4.95
TEE SHIRTS:	Black or Red on White (S-M-L)	$2.95

TO ORDER WRITE:

THE PARIS REVIEW
45-39 171 PLACE
FLUSHING, N.Y. 11358

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LIVES!

Take heart all who've despaired that nothing's left of English but jargon, graffiti and acronyms!

TWENTIETH CENTURY POETRY is a feast, an abundance, a revel of English. A marvel. A sensuality of words.

John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read have chosen their poets and poems for sheer pleasure. The acknowledged masters are here—Auden, Pound, Moore and Roethke—side by side with poets whose promise is still maturing—99 in all to overwhelm you with the sublime purity of their art.

And Rollie McKenna has blessed this beautifully designed book with photographs that reveal, describe, and complete.

The totality is joy.

TWENTIETH CENTURY POETRY: AMERICAN & BRITISH (1900-1970)

Edited by John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read

Index $8.95 **McGRAW-HILL**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELAINE

LOVES

THE PARIS REVIEW

ELAINE'S

1703 SECOND AVE
NEW YORK CITY

reservations: TE1-9558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eldorado 5-2360-1

Sills
of
Cambridge

7 east 48th street
New York, N.Y. 10017

NO HASSLES

By

ANNE WALDMAN

•

Published by
THE KULCHUR FOUNDATION

888 PARK AVENUE
New York, N. Y. 10021

3 dollars paperback
6 dollars hard cover

TOM VEITCH MAGAZINE

8 issues 5 dollars
sample copy $1

*

GRAPE PRESS / PANTS PRESS

small press books
catalog on request

*

PO Box 40267
San Francisco, Calif. 94140

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LYTTON STRACHEY IN PENGUINS

New this month

Eminent Victorians

Queen Victoria

Lytton Strachey: A Biography
by Michael Holroyd

Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group: His Work, Their Influence
by Michael Holroyd

Already published

Elizabeth and Essex

Write for a free copy of PENGUINEWS to The Publicity Manager, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Six years late, we finally found three novellas good enough for another edition of "THREE"

Three was supposed to have been an annual publication. However, because of the shortage of really top-notch short novels, *Three: 1964* was our last effort. Now, six years and 2,150 manuscripts later, we have what we were looking for . . .

THE GOOD PROFESSOR WHO MURDERED THE BAD LITTLE GIRL
By Arthur Gould

THE LAST ONE
By Calvin Kentfield

A COFFEEHOUSE ACQUAINTANCE
By Edith Templeton

Three: 1971

$5.95, now at your bookstore, or direct from
RANDOM HOUSE
Dept. W, 201 E. 50th St.,
New York, N.Y. 10022

Morris West

Summer of the Red Wolf

A dramatic story of love and the search for identity told by a master novelist. Collectors' Editions Club Choice

£2.10

Wallace Stegner

Angle of Repose

An old man contemplates his own life and that of his grand parents in the 18th century American West, interconnecting the two in a way that makes this novel distinguished not only as a narrative tour de force, but also an ambitious excursion into the interweaving of time past and present. U.S. Literary Guild Selection.

£3.25

Paul Scott

The Towers of Silence

The third novel in Paul Scott's "splendid and responsible" sequence of novels about the last years of British rule in India.

£2.75

Dymphna Cusack

A Bough in Hell

A moving and human story of a woman in the grip of alcoholic addiction.

Heinemann

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

front. EL5-8857

back. EL5-9307

reservations . PL9-1650

"The New York Hotel with the endearing qualities (and cuisine) of a Fine Inn."

HOTEL Algonquin

59 West 44th St., New York, N.Y. 10036 •

Reservations: (212) MU 7-4400

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PARIS REVIEW

Publisher Sadruddin Aga Khan
Editors George A. Plimpton, Peter Matthiessen, Robert B. Silvers, Blair Fuller, Donald Hall, Peter Ardery, Maxine Groffsky
Poetry Editor Tom Clark
New York Office Lillian von Nickern
Associate Editors Maggie Paley, Frank H. Crowther
London Editors Tom Maschler, Graham C. Greene
London Advertising Arthur Boyars
Editorial Assistants *New York:* Rose Styron, Pat Padgett, Christopher Cerf, Peter Schuyten, Judi Claremon, Steve Lynton, Jill Fox, Sandra Saudek, Benna Wilde, Gerald Krakauer
Paris: Laura Chandler
Advisory Editors Nelson Aldrich, Patrick Bowles, Joan Dillon, William Pene Du Bois, Drue Heinz, John Train, Harold L. Humes, Ben Johnson, Jonathan Miller, John Phillips, Thomas H. Guinzburg, Lawrence M. Bensky, Frederick Seidel, Terry Southern, Max Steele, Philip Roth, William Styron, Eugene Walter

The Paris Review is published by The Paris Review, S.A.R.L. au capital de 10.000 F. Vol 13, No 52. Numéro de presse 26.295. Summer 1971. European office at 17 rue de Tournon, Paris 6. American office at 45-39 171 Place, Flushing, New York 11358. Distributors in the USA: Eastern News Company and Doubleday & Co.; outside of France & USA: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 30 Bedford Square, London WC 1. Representative of The Paris Review Inc. of New York in France: Société Tourvoy, 17 rue de Tournon, Paris 6; la gérante: Mme. Colette Duhamel. Printed in the Netherlands by Koninklijke Drukkerij G.J. Thieme, N.V., Nijmegen.

Price per copy in France: 5F; in the USA: $1.25; in the UK: 30p. Postpaid subscription for four issues in France: 21 F; in the USA: $4; in the UK & sterling area: £1.40.

Fiction manuscripts should be submitted to the Flushing or Paris offices; poetry to Tom Clark, c/o Flushing office. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by addressed envelope and stamps or international postage coupons.

Charter member of the Association of Literary Magazines of America.

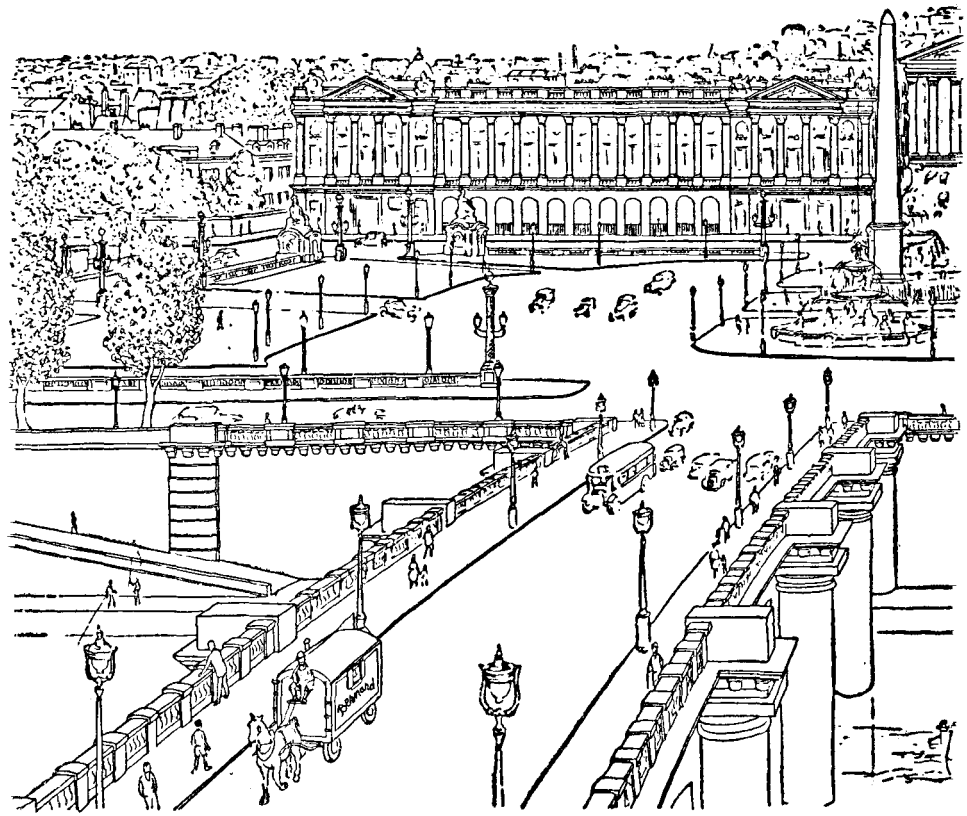
Second Class Postage Paid at New York, New York.

Note to Subscribers

Subscriptions to The Paris Review are for 4 or 8 consecutive issues, not for 1 or 2 years. Dates of issues are irrelevant to the length of a subscription.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PARI



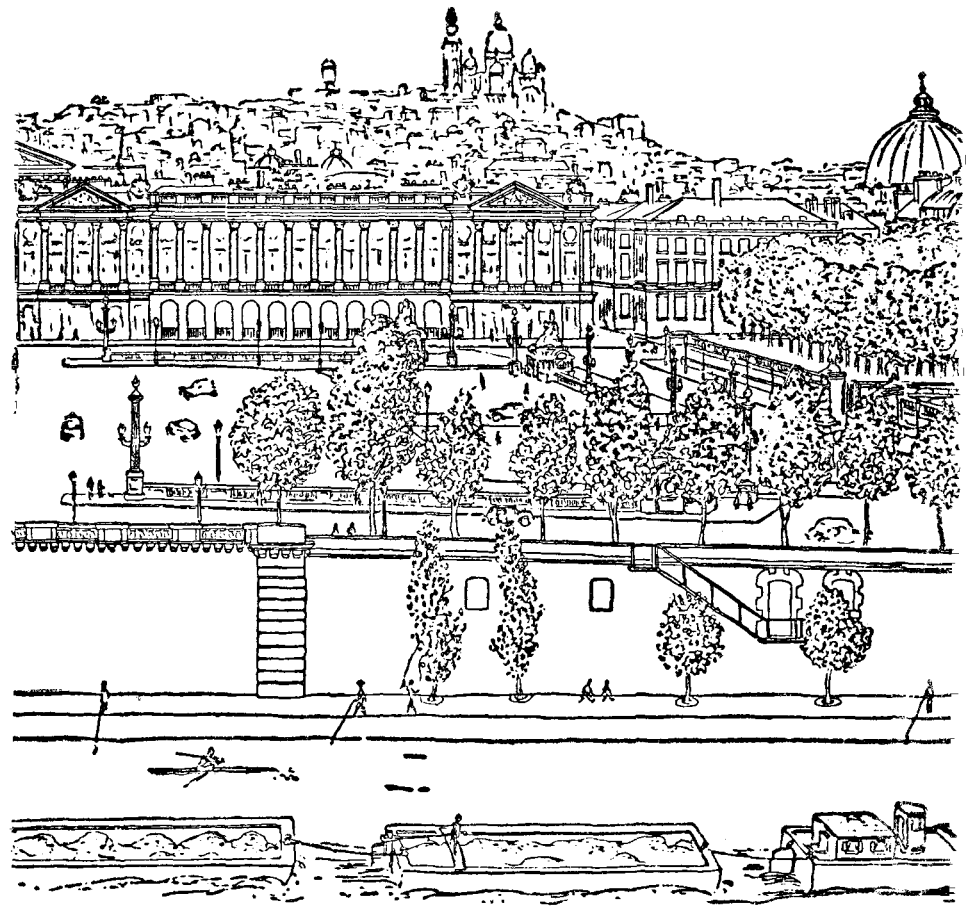
17 rue de To

45-39 171 Place
Flushing, New York 11358

Doubled
277 Park

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

S REVIEW



ıon Paris 6

Company
New York

Jonathan Cape Limited
30 Bedford Square, London

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Number 52

Cover by Mark Lancaster
Frontispiece by William Pene du Bois
Photograph of Anne Sexton by Rollie McKenna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Interview

Anne Sexton	*The Art of Poetry XV*	*158*

Letters

James Blake	*The Happy Islanders*	*101*

Fiction

Michael Brownstein	*Three Stories*	*12*
Keith Cohen	*Phenomenal Feelings*	*16*
Harry Mathews	*The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium*	*33*
Joyce Carol Oates	*Plot*	*81*
Paul West	*Caliban's Filibuster*	*137*

Poetry

Ted Berrigan	*Things to Do in Providence*	*132*
Scott Cohen	*Poems*	*154*
Jack Collom	*Two Poems*	*147*
Jim Dine	*Two Poems*	*129*
David Henderson	*Canticle*	*80*
Anselm Hollo	*To Be Born Again*	*152*
John Koethe	*A Sunday Drive*	*128*
Frank Lima	*Poems*	*75*
Harris Schiff	*Pure Poison*	*153*
Lewis Warsh	*Two Poems*	*77*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Three Stories

Michael Brownstein

Resentment

Chuckles sounded at odd places around the table. "Tensions are oddly distributed here tonight," Jessica thought. "There's too much going on of which I'm not aware... I'll have to develop new information sources."

She passed her gaze down the circle of shining, chattering faces, silently extracting pieces of new information from each one. Then she fit these pieces together and a bulb lit up inside her head. The faces around the table noticed this, and resented it. Everyone stopped talking and eating and petulantly turned toward Jessica, who rose from her seat, hands trembling and eyes blinking, and blurted out: "I understand you! I understand everything about you! All your hopes and dreams! Now you can go on eating..."

Instead, however, a shocked silence reigned. One by one the insulted guests rose from their places, flung their party napkins onto the table and stalked out of the room.

Jessica, left alone in the enormous dining hall, nevertheless didn't really care, because now she understood everything. "What more is there to say?" was about how she was feeling. A blinding beam of light, representing inner illumination, filled the room, forcing the servants who removed the remnants of a half-finished meal to don sunglasses and cream-colored pith helmets to shield themselves from the glare...

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Old, trusted servants who had been with Jessica's family for generations would not have tread more softly than these, nor would they have completed the task of clearing out the dining area. These were good young ones, and as they came and went, their giant breasts and penises swaying rythmically in the light, Jessica began to smoulder with what an impartial eye witnessing the scene might think sex. But it wasn't, and not only because eyes don't think. Instead, Jessica was diving into the scented waters of a general outpouring of sensual dentifrice, of deep sentiment for all humanity, for personal unbounded energy clothed in frail mortal bodies. A panorama unfolded of endless waves of people letting out the string or jet stream of their destinies, the sad wake of a modest bark upon life's waters, the dog wandering in from the cold to sit, puzzled but warm, near a roaring fire in a strange castle... The silence of centuries wandering in with him.

This castle comes complete with dripping walls, vaulted kitchens and modern torture chambers, where unsuspecting orphans stiffen under the blows of a misunderstood white knight—what he really wanted to do was help them.

In Jessica's vision, the knight—regal bearing, incisive mind and all—stands buried in thought, his slipper near the licking flames. Then he snaps out of it to see the dog, an animal he had never laid eyes on before, absent-mindedly licking his boot and peering up at him... "Well, well, and what have we here?" the knight says, with the good-natured condescension white knights use when talking to children, stray Jews and wandering dogs... "What have we here?" repeats the blue blood. "Nothing," barks the dog, "nothing at all."

"Puzzled but warm" is such a great phrase, thought Jessica. I wonder why the knight is wearing a slipper on one foot and a boot on the other? I wonder who buried him in thought? How I wish he were really here with me, right now!... But I'm sure he doesn't even remember me, or when he made love to me, or fucked me, just a pretty country girl by the side of the road. That seems so long ago. If he could only see me now, wouldn't he be surprised—famous, rich, lovely, and all alone! And all because of my strange powers!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I mean psycho *can't* exist, entertaining invisible ideas about people, including yourself, means that they worry you. They make you a worrier.

The flash—the big one, off and on, then on again. And I'm flashing that you're understanding me, standing there with your arms standing out as you wave them around and around and around and bring them down with a titanic crash on the drums of the great rock band you just joined—Norman Rockwell's old band, the one the late Secretary of State of the state of Illinois used to get it on with...

Norman Rockwell never really wanted to paint Freud's last portrait after all. It was an important commission and he knew some of the most distinguished Western personalities would be there, clustered around Freud's deathbed to witness the old man kick off. But Rockwell, although he was excited by the challenge of painting so many luminaries at once, just didn't feel right about it. Something about Freud irritated him, though he couldn't put his finger on it until some years later when he saw a painting of the same scene done by someone else. "There's no natural light in the room," he thought as he looked up at the epic deathbed panorama. "These men are dead already, not to mention Freud... Freud obviously died somewhere around the turn of the century if not earlier, you can tell just by looking at his hands."

Rockwell was wrong, of course. The men were alive. And yet Rockwell had his finger on part of the truth when he mentioned Freud's hands. If you examine the painting closely, you'll see the hands are actually *invisible ideas*, ideas that were refined, codified and grew rigid many years earlier. So it must be due solely to force of habit that those hands and what they fashioned seemed real. Actually, they were no more real than Occam's razor or a page from the *Ramayana* translated into Phoenician. It has nothing to do with Norman Rockwell's America, which is the shaky breakfast table vanishing before our very eyes, where we were trying to sit down and eat.

Will you pass me the butter, please? Thanks. More pancakes? Thanks... You and I are having breakfast, that's all. I just know I'm seeing you because I can hear you when you call my name. You call my name and I'll be there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Later that night we went to a science laboratory where we were shown a new Abbe microscope. Strindberg listened intently to the technician who demonstrated the improvements over the older type. Then he asked to borrow it and disappeared into another room. After some minutes we went to see what had become of him. We found him kneeling in front of a window sill on which the microscope had been placed. The tube had been reversed and was pointing at the stars. "Strindberg," we said sadly, "what in the world are you doing?"

"I am raising THE MODERN WINDOW TO THE STARS, that's what I'm doing," he shouted back at us, fierce and defensive and vulnerable, his wounded eyes reverberating with a frenzied, distant glance, vulnerable and open and sadly looking back at us... "Poor Strindberg, oh, Strindberg—we can see the Swedish winter daylight fighting and singing its way through your tortured soul!"

"You sound pretty crazy yourself," he said, and with a defiant slouch went back to his microscope, peering through it at the stars. "This may seem like an intellectual dead-end to you, but for me it leads straight out past the stars to a deeper, more penetrating thrust into the nature of the physical universe, and I'm going to give the best years of my life to it," he sang as if to himself, "namely the years 1892 to 1897, when I'll move alone across Europe under a rich, grey rainy sky, stalking down Paris sidestreets alone, I need a shave, I haven't eaten right in years, I'm hurrying along, there, along the high wall that runs through the nineteenth century, down the Boulevard Montparnasse, glancing back over my shoulder as I hurry down the sidewalk, my crazy computations stuffed in lonely notebooks and scraps of paper that fall out of my pockets and float away on the wind..."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phenomenal Feelings

Keith Cohen

LANDING AMONG BLUE TREES

This is the beach that outlined an entire continent. The water on the sand and the water in the air were indistinguishable. At that time, the Emperor was watching the crepe butterflies. He approached the field where his nieces were playing and hid behind some tufted bushes. The girls stopped playing with the other butterflies and strove to catch the one their uncle had secretly perfumed. With one sudden gust of the wind, the butterfly swept over the grassy curl of a jutting cliff, and the Emperor's nieces, ecstatically following it, all fell. The wind instantly stopped, and the butterfly fluttered down zig-zag over the crying heads among the waves. It touched the flowing cheeks, absorbing the tears in its taut crepe wings. With that, the heads sank under the waves, and the wind started up again, carrying the butterfly over the ocean.

This is the way it always is, until you hide, or rather simply lie, under a blanket on the beach with your closest friends. You make a point of not moving. Then you're convinced that your friend has just moved, so you make a more definite move, as if somehow distracted. Others seem to be slowly wriggling one way or another, though the surface of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blanket barely ripples. You're immobilized between the conviction and the wish that something is jabbing you. There is no length or width under the blanket and practically no perspective. The rain doesn't stop. You are poised between the earth and the earthiness of the friend beside you. You think your friend is asleep. You think your friend thinks you're asleep. You sleep. At the moment the sea water, entering through your nostrils, is spewed into your throat, you wake with a start. The tide has come up and covered the blanket. You reach down to awaken your friends, but they have all drowned.

It is for this reason that now in shreds I float down among blue trees. And it is for this reason that my heels now sink in the firm sand that the ocean water neatly quits. Empires will fall. Glass domes will continue slowly to revolve and then quietly shatter. A thousand worlds will have one moment to say, Here life flourishes. A rag king will say, Send for my supper, and a castle king will say, Tear me to rags. A single palace will house a kingdom of bees, and the queen will then die off. A shipbuilder will discover behind his workshed a flat planet and, upon announcing it to deaf ears, jump off.

Yet one day not long afterwards, the shipwreck was found. The remains of the bridge appeared as the tide reached its lowest point. Several explorers ventured out to the wreck and touched and handled its extremities. The metal was green and porous. The rain that day was heavy. No one arranged to have the shipwreck raised. There were many divers who found small treasures, but the ship itself was considered too bulky and decayed to haul ashore. The rain didn't stop. Workers came and painted the bridge and the mastheads that were exposed at low tide with a thick, black substance. It dripped and shined on the delicate, worn-out metal and dried hard against the dull water.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHANSON

This is a house that looks out for itself. Large photographs fill all twenty-two windows. The front porch is shady and cool. The white paint doesn't crack. Straw chairs tend to reassemble. The long row of six porch photographs sits like an audience behind the empty chairs. The looks are all the same. There are no flames. The reiterated face stares out from every point of the house. Inside it is dark.

Inside it is dark and noisy. Mrs. Mercy quarrels with her boarder. Now she stops, exercising what her husband has just called restraint. She refrains from mentioning the windows. The words are heard. Jacques goes down the steps to the ground floor where he has left his model.

Mrs. Mercy confers with Mr. Mercy in the kitchen. The bread remains unchanged. But sources and impediments are named. Mrs. Mercy glances upward at the ceiling, which forms the floor of the guest room in question. It is empty. The lace on the bureau unwrinkles. Chemical acidity drifts through the air.

As Jacques steps out onto the front porch, Chanson, his model, comes back to life. It is at this moment that Jacques tells her to "Hold it" and begins adjusting the camera. Chanson assumes the same position and facial expression as in the other photographs that cover the house. Jacques manipulates the lens. Children pass by on wooden stick horses.

A pistol shot echoes from the porch to a first-floor window that shakes. Chanson is stunned. Mr. and Mrs. Mercy rush. A thin vapor that has lingered all morning in the guest room, over the bureau and around the lamp shades, suddenly disappears like the inside of an electric tube or the smoke of a carbine. The photos around the house do not flutter. The windows shake slightly. Inside all is quiet; now everyone is remembering what he heard.

This paragraph is the blank: it does not kill. This paragraph

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is the blank: it does not kill. This paragraph is the blank: it does not kill. This paragraph is the blank: it does not kill.

Jacques lowered the gun and, at the same time, pulled the negative holder out of the camera. The photographs around the house have remained unmoved. A look of shock and amazement crosses the face of an elderly man in a tram, who is looking at a photograph in the newspaper. As he dies, the tram clangs again before crossing an intersection. Jacques looks around, as if to determine which of the children has made the sound. The white paint doesn't crack.

Thus it is told how Chanson lives on forever. Another photo is mounted behind the window panes, like another criminal hoisted onto a cross. Legions of trams coast downhill, cooling their motors and preparing for the next tough ascent. Passengers are repeatedly warned, yet continue to lean out through the windows, losing fingers and arms and heads. This is a mortal opportunity. There is no chance for retraction. Saucers fly and—this can be proven—break as they crash against the wall. Mrs. Mercy arrives, her nose pressed firmly against the screen. It is this photograph that appears the next day in the local papers. But Chanson has gone for the day, and the newspapermen, like filaments in a flashbulb, swarm over the house. The guest room is in question. It is, at least, "in good repair." No one disputes. The facts live on, like Chanson, establishing themselves in minds that perceive them. The house grows old, and is constantly renovated. The house grows old.

Now it is dark inside. Now it is dark outside. It is dark now. Inside and outside it is dark. At some uncertain and irregular divide, it is flaming bright.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EXCHANGES AND RESOLUTIONS

for Paula

The pencil rolls away and an airplane returns. These are events that make truths self-evident.

And everything that comes true unfurls a carpet behind it. We signify everything.

The shovel came true, and it dug a hole for oil. Then the highway came true, and places that had felt nothing for one another before were suddenly hooked together. Then at last the airplane came true and burst off into the sky with the two lovers huddled together in the cockpit, leaving the Bohemian king far below to unravel the intrigues that plagued his people.

Thus with the year, we all return and signify the color green. Again, or for the first time, we sharpen one another into focus and cut our fingertips on fresh glass. We are the ones that the shade reveals, that are left whole and moist. We put out our hands and feel for density, but the air is in us now—an empirical failure that transpires in the shade, where blades of grass grow sharp tips as we look at them. These tips, like a doctor's reflex, goad us to consider our new position. Perception bounces up against the wall and hits a piece of protruding mortar. We see through it, as with all things. We want an oxygen for the eyes, but this is unprescribable. We see, and also see it.

Reflect. Reserve. Rebound. Rehearse. Rewind. The camera goes on shooting as hundreds die. The new position is examined from every angle, but our governor is confused. What this lacks is action; no sense of relative location is possible. When something finally comes, we ignore it, or else we inhale it. Nothing will die, for we will never give it credit for having been. Recall and review.

Henceforth the slow enumeration of vapid spaces will diminish. The docile selection of north stars will be precise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and measured, though somewhat extravagant. Nowhere will legislators say, Here comes the law, or will orators say, Here comes the clause. Instead, a universal intuition will reign. A felony will say, Where is my subject? and a knife will say, Where is my object? At the center of all things a molecule will withdraw from its nucleus, and a deep light will penetrate the earth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BLOCKS

for Harry Mathews

A fire trail can never be blocked. Fire-fighting equipment must be transported along these perfectly criss-crossing paths directly to the site of the fire. Any delay caused by blockage may result in hundreds of acres more of stubble. The ground still smoldered. Signals concerning the fire must be made from the nearest adjacent clearing, and not from the nearest trail. Branches are usually laid out on the beach, the best such clearing, in the form of symbols whose meanings are universally agreed upon and whose configurations are visible to the distant surveillance stations.

The ground still smoldered. The King turned from the site of the oracle and raised his eyes to the lookout on a distant peak. There, a vassal turned from his duty to Rubia (the name that the Queen, in disguise, always assumed under such circumstances), who had just reached the lookout with a basket in her hand. She was out picking mushrooms and wanted the vassal, Giorgio, to come along with her. They went along twisting paths to the center of the forest. It rains here only occasionally. Soon Giorgio and Rubia were down on the ground, and all the mushrooms fell from her basket. Their yellow stems made criss-cross designs all across the bottom of Rubia's golden satiny skirts. They came up. And Rubia then held Giorgio close to her and let the gigantic pine trees mingle their branches far above her.

It rains here only occasionally. But whenever it is about to, the tree people are the first to have an inkling of it. They shake the branches around their treetop houses, so as to spread the word from one to another. Ash branches, oak branches, fir branches, pine branches, birch branches, elm branches, olive. And if the sun has not already been covered over by clouds, it is now blocked out by the criss-crossing limbs. The soil, being damp, gave slightly. Up above, as each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

family of tree people receives the message, it pulls together tightly its leafy habitat. In this way, the weak assemblages cling to the branches and will not blow away during the storm.

The soil, being damp, gave slightly. Giorgio rolled over onto his back. He propped his head up on one hand and relaxed all over. Rubia let down her satiny skirts. She turned onto her side to look at Giorgio. Then they both looked up. It wasn't a question of rain. A fresh smell floated through the air. Giorgio dressed and started running, leaving Rubia alone with her scattered mushrooms. Their yellow stems curled up. Soon Rubia followed.

It wasn't a question of rain. Nevertheless, as the King raised a cupped hand to his eyes, there were all the signs. Trees turned their leaves upward, and off in the distance the sky grew dark. The fire trails did not occur to him. The message from the oracle had been perfectly clear, but now, like the sky that billowed over the treetops, it was quite impenetrable. "The Queen's love is fire." The idea that this love was not in the least for him, spread through the King's mind like the flames that licked the hard, dry limbs. This is the final requisite. His cupped hand slowly covered his eyes before he turned to the lookout on a distant peak.

This is the final requisite. The fire trail must be uniformly lined on each side with small saplings, so that its boundaries will not later be confused by the irregular limbs of full-grown trees. These young trees can be cast aside if necessary when equipment is rushed along the trails. At this moment there is no equipment in sight. The fire gorges itself on row after row of trees. Signals are sent up in vain. The fire trails flow luxuriantly down the mountainsides and make toothlike bumps along the rich crests. These same trails disappear as the burning trees collapse one on top of the other. Those who watch retire noiselessly. The fire is left alone, oblivious. This is the end of a startling forest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BYZANTINE VENICE

Always across the surface of the water are parallel lines of ripples and crests. Always in the air is an irregular and muffled whimpering, the articulation barely begun of something painful. Gloria, her eyes toward the sun, has one hand resting against the front of her neck. No sound is coming from her throat; nor is any pain located here.

At the foot of a bridge stands a woman and beside her a small child. The child's hands stretch out around one hip of the woman, whose head is slowly turning. The woman's pupils now glide to the acute extremity of her eyelids; her hand rests on the child's shoulder. Gloria is seated at the prow.

"Is it a cigarette?" asks the child. Gloria is leaning back; smoke is dispersed around her.

The irratic whimpering stops whenever Simon begins to speak. He speaks little. He is rowing; there are also the splashes of the oar. He points out the maritime filling station that they pass. Just above his words there is a loud burst of hydraulically compressed air. At the next arched bridge he guides the kayak close to the quai and stands on tiptoe to touch the moist wooden rafters as they pass underneath. There are other posts to hang onto, other landing places and jetties. There are stacks of brown and yellow fruit.

The fog sets in; Gloria is stretched out completely on the deck of the small boat, her head propped against a cushioned ballast. Simon continues at the oar. Now he is obliged to go more slowly; it is difficult to see in front of him. The fog seems to lift only here and there with the appearance of small brightly lit wharves. At one such wharf a woman dressed in unwrinkled satin and sparkling jewelry turns to a man with whom she speaks closely. Two boys run along the pier and stop to exchange quick words and jabs. Then one of them runs farther down to where the man and woman are talking. He jumps up onto a wooden hauling chest that sits directly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind the woman in satin. The chest is made of dark-colored planks laterally fitted together; its wood is deeply eroded and encrusted in various places with hardened masses of underwater growth. With two fingers of one extended hand, the boy touches the pearls around the woman's neck.

"What are you doing?" says Simon. "Asleep?"

Gloria, wrapped now in dark blankets, floats on. Her eyes are shut and her hands folded over her chest. The kayak that holds Gloria winds around the slow bends of the canal. Simon's splash is abruptly interrupted when he asks his question again. There is still no response. The fog has erased every image around the boat; Simon sits down at his end and places the oar across his knees. There is now not even the response of water against wood, and the kayak's self-perpetuating roll has become a frictionless motion through fog and smoke. It is no longer really possible to know if the kayak is moving, if the piers have somehow receded against their embankments, or if the canal may have uncannily opened out onto the sea. It is not really possible to know these things until a diffuse light approaches and stops just above the prow of the boat.

It is perhaps a small island wharf they have moored against; Simon reaches out to find the pier. He hears voices but can feel or see nothing. These are the voices of haulers whose sea-blue overalls suddenly darken the bright fog. They reach down into the boat and carefully lift out the painting that remains dark in the diffuse light of the wharf. Their rough hands grip the wooden frame delicately and stand out brilliantly red against its modulating grain. As the two haulers continue to work, the one dangling a long arm from the pier to boost the painting up to the other, two couples, grouped together at the railing of the pier, turn around toward the cloudy light. The two women are seated on the railing itself, balancing themselves carefully as they turn to watch the haulers' work. The two men peer out from the opposite side of the women.

"Above all," says Simon, "please don't fall."

But Gloria remains encircled by the foremost fog. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

continues floating through deepening browns and greens, though this diaphanous light never leaves her. Slowly and ever frictionlessly she moves toward the upper right-hand corner of the frame, where the dark-grained panels have been fitted together with lighter panels. It is this corner of the painting that the topmost hauler presses his whitening thumbs against as he directs it into the van.

After the painting is mounted in the first chapel to the right of the altar, the haulers leave by the right transept door. Several candles have been lit in the chapel, which remains nonetheless somber like a small wharf on a foggy evening. The peeling statues on either side of the painting disappear in the billowing fumes of the paper-thin candles; the old woman in black veils goes on lighting a few more before the painting. A sharp crackling, like the smack of an oar against water, is emitted now and then either from the candles or from the statues. The old woman alternately genuflects and kneels as she passes from one side of the semi-circular railing to the other, and she must stretch with some effort in order to touch the Virgin in the painting. The crackling is now rejoined by her own audible wheezing or faint whimpering like a child as she exhales and finally lowers herself back down to her knees.

Simon returns with packages of medicine. But the old woman is despondent. Simon again suggests that she has been asleep, then, that she sleep. The woman only stares at him coldly and turns her eyes back to the floating Virgin.

"There were only fruit markets opened along the canal," says Simon.

It is at this moment that he kneels down to set the packages next to the old woman. Soon he will reappear along the canal. The haulers sing a hunting song as they reach the brightening pier. And all through the city a thick fog, constantly confused with the night, lifts from the piers and the arched bridges. Everyone turns from the canal and sees freshly corroded mosaics. No one remembers the color of the fog.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I LIKED THEIR HOUSE

I liked their house and everything in it. Perhaps I shall be able to visit them soon.

Over the mantle there was a city hotel. It stood on a side street near a large square. Across from the hotel entrance was a wooden barricade that said "No Parking." Behind the barricade construction or perhaps repair work was going on. Light shined in on a second-floor room of the hotel. Inside the room there was a metal-frame bed, a chair, a chest, and a table with a light on it. The door to the bathroom was open. Against one wall of the bathroom were a mirror and a sink. Against another wall was a window. Against the third wall was a toilet. At the foot of the toilet squatted a gray pigeon. Now it moved a little bit forward. Now it moved a little bit back.

I liked their house and everything in it. Perhaps I shall be able to visit them soon.

On the phonograph was a red plastic record. Each time the needle automatically lifted up to begin again a new story was told.

"It was a big bear. This big bear wandered along a country lane until he came to a beehive filled with honey. The beehive was also filled with bees. The bees were busily at work filling their home with honey. The big bear paid no attention to the bees. He pawed at the hive and tried to stick his snout inside. The bees were outraged. They buzzed angrily around the bear's head complaining that he had no respect for their long hours of labor. The bear was also angry because he could not get the honey from the hive. So he knocked it down from the tree with one paw. He bent over to drink the sweet honey as it flowed out of the broken hive. But from every direction came the bees. All over his big body he felt their stings. And the big bear ran away down the country lane."

"It was a young fawn. All day he had searched through the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woods for his mother. He crossed fields and hills he had never seen before. As dusk fell the fawn began to fear he would never find his mother. Then he came to the turnpike. Cars sped in both directions and in one lane after another. The young fawn knew he could never cross. His mother was probably not on the other side anyway. So he calmly walked out onto the highway and was smacked down and crushed by a long black limousine."

"It was a miserly old gremlin. This gremlin lived under a bridge and charged a toll to everyone who crossed it. He became rich and spent the whole day counting his money. He never spent any of it to improve the bridge. Then one day a herd of wild horses discovered the bridge and the gremlin beneath it. They carefully crept onto the bridge and then all at once reared up on their hind legs. This crumbled the bridge and crushed the mean gremlin beneath it. The wild horses swam ashore unharmed."

I liked their house and everything in it. Perhaps I shall be able to visit them soon.

On the television there was an old movie. It was about an old-fashioned airplane. This airplane was used to bring supplies to the troops during the war. It was used to fly important people back and forth across the country. It was used to carry messages to distant places. Then at last it was used by the hero of the movie to rescue a girl being held captive by gangsters in the wilderness. But before they could get out of the wilderness the airplane ran out of fuel. The brave pilot scanned the land below in vain for a place to land. He headed for the only flatland nearby. This land was covered by a dense forest. The airplane came gradually down on its last drops of fuel and grazed the tall trees that stuck out from the others. Then its propellers became jammed in the branches. It flipped through the air and burst into flames.

I liked their house and everything in it. Perhaps I shall be able to visit them soon.

Out back in the woods there were several paths to follow. Not far from their house on the central path were the smoldering remains of a plane that had tried to make a crash

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

landing. Puffs of smoke still rose from the heaps of bent metal and charred wood. Farther along the central path merged with one of the other paths that ran alongside a river. Over this river stretched a bridge. And under the bridge was a mean-looking gremlin. From the other side of the bridge could be seen off in the distance a herd of wild horses. The main path was joined by yet another path. These paths all led to the edge of the forest where a wide highway cut its way through. Not far down this highway stood a small fawn preparing to cross. Farther on the highway branched into a small town. Nearby was a hotel that faced a wooden barricade off a large square. All was quiet around this square and along the little street. Suddenly a pigeon burst out of a second-floor window and hovered for an instant before the window with its wings fully unfurled and its clawed legs curled tightly under. Then it darted toward the highway and down across the flatland forest.

I liked their house and everything in it. Perhaps I shall be able to visit them soon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PHENOMENAL FEELINGS

for Paula

This is a night that bears a phenomenon. You produce it but never recognize it. Like some baby who's forgotten as soon as he's born, it grows and, in its way, becomes awkward and cumbersome. You nurture it. You fondle it, and when the light seeps in through the curtains you look for it frantically like a Hindu driven mad by ritual infanticide.

It was the night that bore it. And you nurtured it unwittingly. The fly went on buzzing as I came out of the room. When I swatted it, it stopped, only to buzz once more in a wild dervish on the table. Waiting for the final blow. Thus we are struck with a sense of responsibility—a dash of foreknowledge and a hint of cause-and-effect.

The morning finally begins with a bath. You are detained downstairs with the neighbors, and the splashing gives rise somewhere to a panic. The flies didn't buzz. But an insinuation of panic like that creates doubts of the relative dangers. Slippery and slipshod, the towel wouldn't grip. The day grew on many who were outside. These are the incidental interferences and oblivious processes that follow a night of phenomena.

It was at that moment I knew that I had to go down. You came and collected the books. The elevator didn't know where to stop. And the guy with giant sunglasses went on patrolling the door, somehow wary of the sunshine's popularity. U-turns, new turns, huge turns, few turns for me. Or at least so it seemed when the turns of a dance become those competitive turns you made me wait for. For these were the books that held up an argument. The librarian looked askance. Now these books were the dissolving framework. Like so many wooden barricades suddenly used as beams, these books had been part of a fabulous structure. So I left you at the library filling out what was now an economic framework. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

left you at the library rebuilding one series as another played out. And when you returned to get me, I finally knew that a hundred million structures are nothing next to a bare phenomenon.

Night first brought other nights. Here is a night that drowns circumvention. Feelings were ripe. The stars didn't stop. Records called out their dicta; people responded. In turn and by turning, each ideology deferred to its neighbor. Then swing your partner. This is a moment of unhoped-for curiosity. Suddenly the world is seen as a mirror image of everything it once was. Circling hands and jagged hips re-echoed the maxim. Here is a night to scan a totally blackened horizon. Or rather, be scanned. For now the object has become endowed with overweening consciousness. One hymn gives way to another; one star is reflected by a thousand neighbors; one look gives rise to the idea that lurks behind it. And speculations vanish like so many toads. (Stop croaking in the reeds.)

Far off, there was a real explosion to speak of. A quiet sister emitted her final photon of light and, in one momentary burst of potential intelligence, scattered her matter to all parts of the universe. We shall record this event light-years hence.

But records, like those that had been playing, contain and retain their data, possessed. With each new revolution another line of development is reached. A new measure, a new tube, a new state. Slowly the needle bore on. The black grooves went under, one after another, impassively. And from the speakers, a kinetic storm blew up, quivering and ripe for its moment of pronunciation. This is new. Or rather, was new. Now these messages are locked back in their records, never uttered but only repeated as hearsay.

And of the night in question? That was a night of phenomenal feelings. They had ripened, and actions were imminent. The sudden call—among many calls—went through; you responded with a barrage of cars. One after another, impassively, I looked into these cars. Then got into them. None of them worked. This was a scene that had to be thrilling. That at a moment of increasing incidental interferences, an action

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intervenes: *get the keys*. A push, then a punch, and a black-out. That at a moment of total loss there is still feeling. There is at least still knowing of the supposed and subsequent feelings. There is a knowing of things that seem effortlessly born in the feelings and grow up, nurtured and unnurtured, elsewhere. A sure knowing that sure became thrilling: that nothing can stifle these newborn products of the feelings; that in every structure a paradox is promised that makes room for the feelings; that, at a time when society not only has nothing to offer us but must convulse or else be convulsed to prove it, there are *still* these feelings. This is a testament of those phenomenal feelings.

Once in a world there's a fabulous structure. And this structure is filled with parties and ideas and well-wishes. And then the fun dies away. And soon the well-wishes become strong-boxes for ideas, and the parties go on into this and every other night without causing any major cheer. Until at last the structure itself disappears. This is the moment of total upheaval. Flies don't buzz and stars stop. For each imperfect arena there is reflected an equal and imperfect cloud. And soon even this correspondence lags. Yet this lagging rudely fills the apparent absence of action and, as a fact, starts counting. A pigeon meets the window ledge with a jolt of confidence. Birds cover the sky. A pocket is emptied of its anxious contents, an ant is born on a hill, a motor fires, and the case is made. You will nurture these phenomena. Outside a new day will grow on me. And someone will notice what really is happening.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium

Harry Mathews

PART TWO

XIX

June 22

They have caught the sulfuric acid fiend, whose last target was our drinking fountains.

There is, for me, even better news. ("Black oxen cannot tread on my feet forever.") Mr. Hodge has proposed me for the Knights of the Spindle.

The Knights are the most exclusive club in Florida, with an unvarying membership of sixty-six. It is extraordinary proof of Mr. Hodge's influence to have secured my nomination. When he told me of it, I protested that I did not deserve it; he refused to listen. "You can't knock me. You're a good man." My protests weren't entirely honest—he might have been playing a painful joke. But he confirmed my eligibility by presenting me with an angel-noble of ruddy luster, suggesting that I cure my stye in time for the initiation.

Did you see that a new six-pointed star was discovered at the Miami observatory? Appropriately, it lies within the confines of Moses' Basket.

Today, as I walked along a street in the faubourgs, a van came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squealing round the corner, the sun blazing on its windshield and I suppose in the driver's eyes. It was an apple van, full of "manducation apples." Have I told you about them? They are a fruit of resilient texture, specially developed to teach infants how to chew, and they've boomed. One cannot visit the supermarket without hearing a number of mothers, any number of grandmothers, and innumerable great-grandmothers raving about them. But no one remembers that the practice was originally Pannamese. I've forgotten your fruit—doesn't it mean "bone mango"?

This happened around noon. It must be noon in Florence —no, midnight. Twang, when shall we once again watch chameleons puffing on a sunny tree? Dan is throwing a party here this evening. He wasn't able to use his own place because he's in flight from his next-to-last twist (I never met her.) There is no peace for me here. My walls are gauze-thin, the roar of wassail penetrates them as if they were imaginary. Perhaps my last sentences give the impression that the party has already begun. It's a pleasant idea. I would like to be writing you in solitude while my friends and others wildly celebrate a room-and-a-half away. And when the party does start I may not actively participate. My recent high life has exacted its price, diarrhea, so tonight perhaps I'll withdraw to this desk, and gazing under my bright little lamp at your last, tender, undated letter, commune with you over rice and tea. My loveliest one, let us always be shrines to each other, consecrated to faith and confidence! Thanks to you, I count myself among the "little remainder" of the saved. Damn this party and this life of waiting! Cleaning up will be the worst. I remember that after one of Dan's revels the scraps filled seven garbage baskets, bodies excluded. Speaking of which, Grace has a date with "someone new" tonight and plans to bring him. She'll go on carping about you nonetheless.

I can't send you money with this letter because my checkbook is all stubs, but Monday I'll get a new one. Oops—the debit and credit columns are exactly even. But that's all right. Mr. Hodge today gave me some tips on the hounds,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and since bookmakers know no Sundays, I'll collect tomorrow.

I forgot about the apple van. Not that it was interesting, only scary. I had gone out to Dalmanutha to see the green lion, famous to readers of "Believe it or not." As I said, the fellow was dazzled as he rounded the corner, and he veered onto the sidewalk, missing me by one micro-inch. Limp with shock, I sat down on the pavement. The anxious driver jumped from the cab. It was the long-haired right fielder of the Cannon team. I assured him between wheezes that I was unharmed. He trembled silently, then declared, laboring each syllable, "My name is Hyperion Scarparo," and gave me an apple.

XX

June 26

I have the wish of to-say in my last latter, yet fatique did not can. Gold is no fool-like dreem, in all place in all time that 's worth-full. Tell you to Bamma Deng you not be-lieve so, he say, Forth! (Twang shall n't ever say it.) I thikn all-so empire is honormost post in the sport. But you 're tacit, a bout, who win the threemost game?

Atr-am, wey nob mau Lao, that signify: I think aï, to have-be a Laotion! For they are ever board in of-love bussness, and guiet after, yet Twang do-tell to you. At late-er that midniht of hlock, I mont the train to Florence. I de-vide the room with 2 man-Italian. One to left speaks english, and he 's the thought, I 'm his reel friend. One hquench the light for sleep, I do n't enter sleep, for the "friend" lie on me, all-so after I stroke him hard-ly. I think, that is absurb to be-come wiled. The man who do n't say english or any thing go down in Terni, Umbria. The fiend have be-gin agin, I want you, I do a-long fiht for ours til to Firenze. I 'm strong, but he 's top, and un-wieldly, just be fore the stazion I have-braek two of my best naels on him. It's pael dawn as he con-docts me to a hostel. Well, it is a nough for to day.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XXI *

July 1

Jesus! When for once I was ahead, your letter came and set me back a week of Sundays. I try to improve my feelings but it's no use. The spirit of sacrifice is beyond my compass. Don't *you* be reconciled to such a sacrifice. If you can bear it I cannot, the thought of you being in the coils of that worm annihilates me. It's bad enough staggering down the dark avenue of my imagination, seeing your shawl soiled and your necklace shedding pearls about the train. But those words "conducts me to a hotel"—at any price ransom those words from the well of despair where they lie chained, tell me what they mean. The greasy scum, to pick a jewel when the streets are full of mudkickers! Beloved, tell me exactly what happened, because reliving the scene, extrapolated from your prose and deformed in the convex mirror of anguish, is hourly kneading my brain into new folds. I'm too nervous to work. (But Montpelier promises to help.) Twang, only a frail miracle joins us, a silky cocoon that we precariously spun, to be clung to until the later time. I would commit murder to protect it. The only pleasure I've had since this morning is imagining that man beaten like a snake, or strapped across the muzzle of a howitzer. You didn't eat with him? He don't deserve to lap cold tea from your saucer.

XXII

July 3

Yet how, gives Montpellier the help (who 's he)? Have-pass 3 months since I write a zen story as you in-joy, hear is a other to extratract you from angger: "A yuong man a range his stance so he have can to a distant land to study a certan Master Three. At an end of three, with to-feel of no sense, he 've-present to the Master his de-parture. The Master say,

* Special delivery

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'You 've-be three, why more?' 'A greed.' But he stil feell he have-do no advance. He tolded the Master, that he was the Master, say, 'Look, Three and Three.' 'Stay Three.' He did but with sucsecs. He have-tell the Master that have-happen, the Master said, 'You 've-be tears, moths, sands, the end of time. You have-*hate* in-lighten-meant. Hommit suisise.' The end of the dent was in lighten." I have-donde this trans-lation giust as I come to west, so it 's clumbsy.

That poor man-italian is a poor one. Oh I say it to you, he 's full to his hairs (not-many) with shaem and sorror. As he make those events he 's dronk, as the 3-dollar skunk. At the dawn he vommit over the piazza del duomo, and mingle his tears to-it (like the zen youht.) I have-telled him, now it's addio. He said, I mean arrivederci, but I say, no, for-ever, I ex-plane the to-mean of *duvaï*. This is then he vomitt. Have I give the Pan word of I vommitt, *uüax-m*, it 's so otomato-poetic I beleve? He raise and fall any times on the cobbler stones, he wax eloquence, and he does an aoth on the hat of his mamma he 'll-be ubediant to Twang, and good, so it is all rite, and what more, I all-so my in tire love, my *stheu lemu*, Twang rise an neel at your foot and beg to obeg you. I 've not eat nether love with him, on-ly scratsh, and we all two have a litle pain (I, my bustit nails) and this, is a muilde bound.

XXIII

July 7

You have half drawn that arrow from my bowels, but I still cannot dispel the vision of what may have happened. Scouring my thoughts with the bristles of reason has not banished the possibility that you consented, no matter how little, in the desires of that odious man. You must know that even a passive surrender to impureness begets moral anarchy in general and insomnia in particular. Lord, lord, the noose tightens and I choke—at this moment he may be taking advantage of your generous nature! I tell you, bad fruit means a bad tree, and such trees should be cut down and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burnt. Why don't you stick him in the can for a while?

Yesterday the preparatives for my initiation began. I visited the Knights' official tailor, Mr. Zone, to be fitted for my robes. He followed a ritual procedure: purple-red cloth, worked with random crescents of silver, was wrapped around me and shaped with a large razor.

As Mr. Zone began his task, I was joined by Dexter Hodge (my sponsor), and two Knights who were to examine me. Greeting me in a stiff, kind way, they declared me fit for Spindle candidacy: competent persons had seen me leave the Egyptian Temple "under the awning of accepted novices." I turned toward Mr. Hodge, who lowered his head to mutter, "Don't bobble them. It's O.K."

Masked with spangled cloth, three framed pictures hung on one wall of the room. The Knights uncovered them, instructing me to pick the "truest" and to justify my choice.

To the left was a painting, "A Pilgrim in El Dorado." By a calm and sunny sea, airy groves showered pomegranates and dates on the mingled children of beast and man; while in the deeper shade of oaks, egg-pale hermaphrodites danced for a bearded sorceress around a magic fire, in which the salamander and phoenix thrived. The mood was nostalgic.

To the right was a blown-up pornographic photograph, full of the cold shine of flashbulb on skin.

At the center was a drawing in inks. Three elementary figures, triangle, circle, and pentagon, were linked by a meandering cord at once arbitrary and exact. Mr. Hodge coughed. He was standing in front of me. In one hand, thrust behind him, he held a white card printed with large green capitals. I declaimed the written words: "Geometry provides a plane of refraction between essential being and formal manifestation." (I said "pain" instead of "plane" but my boner went unnoticed.)

No sooner had I spoken than I was ushered out of the tailor's shop into a waiting one-horse carriage. My examiners cheerfully waved good-bye and, alone with the cabby, I rode off. I can't say how long we drove, since I fell into a delicious snooze. I dreamt of you; you caressed me; and at the moment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of your suavest caress, I remembered *him*. He has become a wolf to my dreams and a remora to my will! Opening my eyes, I saw that we were turning around a colossal manhole, the principal entrance to the Dade County sewer complex.

Tradition requires that I invite a group of Knights home to meet my intimates. I'm not looking forward to it. I just waxed the floors to an umblemished sheen, and the thought of all my awful friends marking them up is more than I can bear, let alone the other reasons for not giving a party.

Montpelier is a city in the south of France—funny question. Professor Blesset of Montpelier University is to send the microfilm of a document from Montpelas. He thinks it will interest us; I hope he's right. As regards research, knighthood and the thought of your boyfriend have kept me cooking on one burner.

XXIV

July 12

Now, I work in the Arhive of the State here, so I hurry to say the last fastc from Roma. On Mag 12 & 30 I 've-write, *Bonafazio* (pope) have-take Misser *Todao's* hord and givn it to *Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici*, that he may-negoziatit. This is n't just true, it is no as simple. There is a cousin (sp?) of *Giovanni* of name *Averardo di Francesco de' Medici*, he have-act for Pope ond got gold, then he re-put it to *Giovanni*. *Giovanni* a-sure *Averardo*, he will-negotiatit and have its worth. I owe to-say they're 2 Medici banks then, in Florenze of *Averardo*, of *Giovanni* in Rom. They were friend-like banchs. Then 1397 *Giovanni* make his lone bank in Fiorence, and still he 's-n't-tradad the hlippings. And this new bank rivalrie *Averardo*. And, *Giovanni* make his in-Rome bank complex-er, but all ways with no hapital, any bank have-can to-do this some time, yet there's an opinoin, they have-know of that hord in the cort of the Porpe (this is the large hustomer), so they know, he 's rich, enogh to borror money from-him. *Averardo* all-so was with-out money for the treasure, but he say, it's mine. So he maded a 1st complain a round that time. The complain is in gentl words. There 's fog, a bout of-who the dett the gold clip-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pings should to pay. Be cause, Pope *Boniface* have-made detbs to both housins.

Oh your worsd of angger, a gain, they are come hards a-gains me, the sky and the city so shaek, I think the univorse must be know-ing Love—Khmer pro-verb. Yet you can to see now, your raeg is not with out cause, but with-out reason. Whewhen the bright flags of wool are put a-round the even-ing sky and make it bright, and a sweat small wind come with smells of the mountains, then my heart is to-ward you on his stock-ing knees to love you a thousand folds: *mau pheu*—"I'm you" (rs). I make sugestion, he may not be-arrest, if he do a nice gift. He chump at the chance. So, there's some good thing even in a vomit-er. Shall I say vomiter, as in Pan *uüax* means as well the man, and whawhat he make, and the to-make, thus, I'm un-sure.

XXV

July 17

Even the emphatic commas at the end of your letter left meager room for my gasps. What I ask over and over, and you will not explain, is why you must see him at all. Then to ask him to give you a present is beyond understanding. If I didn't trust you more than myself, oh, so much more!—nevertheless, it all makes me feel like *uüaxm* or *uüax* or whatever. Say, how is it that Pan is inflected—most unneighborly for an Indochinese language. That too is perplexing. Anyway, I do trust you. I know that regret for what's done is a sinful waste of time. I will measure my emotions. But please resist the flamboyance of others, don't let them tumble you into that slithery vase where so many flowers rot. "Twenty-three thousand died and the desert was strewn with their corpses." (An allegory hard to explain, but true.)

Two days ago I passed another Spindle test. It was Census Sunday, and the morning after my party, which went better than I'd expected, since Dan and Grace behaved like the civilized beings they aren't. Two men from the Knights

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called at brunchtime: a dignified gent (the examiner) and an impudent youth whose appearance was grotesque even by my standards—ill-barbered carrot-top sprouting above pinkish eyes, tiny lids daubed with kohl (a teenage practice here), and a harelip the color of beets. He was as respectful of the examiner as he was sassy to me.

We drove out through the northern suburbs, skirting the vast wasteland behind Slaughterhouse Crescent, with its Sunday litter of skulls. We stopped once to investigate a crowd that had gathered by the highway. A donkey—not a horse, as the press reported—had fallen into a well, from which it was being raised by the efforts of other donkeys. Afterwards we reached a pier and parked by a forty-foot, crane-colored fishing boat. The captain, who was waiting by the gangplank, complained of our lateness, saw us aboard, and started up the engines. The young rascal steered.

We rode at a desultory speed, so that I suffered more from torpor than from my usual queasiness. There was little conversation. Lunch was served by an obscure female who mostly lingered below decks. My attention was conspiratorially drawn to the designs on our plates: caducei, scale helmets, serpents biting their tails. I made no comment. I was preoccupied with keeping down the food; to this end I even refused a fine neo-Cuban cigar. Around two o'clock I noticed, near the dallying boat, an effect as of floating cloth-of-gold. I asked the captain what it was. He grinned whitely through his preposterous tan, and without answering, pointed toward the bow. The examiner was emptying onto the ash-gray foredeck a small sack of filings, which he distributed in half-inch mounds: almost touching one another, they formed a closed, irregular curve. When the sack was empty, the examiner beckoned me to watch. The vibrations of the engines were agitating the iron dust, displacing it across the slick paint. The filings gradually assembled into a fixed equilateral triangle. The examiner then asked two questions. To my surprise, I answered them without hesitation.

"Can you define what you see?"

"A triangle is defined by its center—its unmanifest essence."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is this to be explained?"

"No, only sensed in its intensity."

The examiner was standing behind me, and as I said these words I turned toward him, and found myself looking into four astounded faces: behind the cockpit window, the young scamp at the wheel; the captain on the cockpit roof; the examiner in the narrow gangway; the dark woman behind him. Past the stern, the cloth-of-gold was now in focus: loose-stemmed waterweeds.

A flurry of wind blew away the filings. The examiner clapped me on the shoulder, while the captain, gunning his engines, turned the boat around to speed homewards. My stamina exhausted, I lurched aft and abandoned my meal to the muddy billows of the Everglades.

The presence of a triangle in both tests seemed deliberate. According to the examiner, it was not. He explained, after I'd cleaned up, that the second triangle referred to a game played at the Knights' "mother club," somewhere in Asia. The game, which resembles squash, requires a convex triangular court. Of the reappearance of the triangle he said, "Chance is a wise master," and shifted my attention to a snakebird drying its wings on a mangrove.

On the drive home, our car stopped at the edge of town, insofar as there is an edge. The carriage that had fetched me from the tailor's was drawn up by the roadside. The examiner saw me into it and, as he left, handed me a morocco pouch with one gold coin in it—an *écu sans soleil.*

My carriage ride was long: we twice drove from the starting-point to the manhole I told of. There must be a significance to this. I have become convinced that in my dealings with the Knights everything that happens is symbolic; even if I don't know of what, that doesn't matter, what counts is that I am being guided along a spiritual itinerary. My nature has been sufficiently distracted to loosen its hold, and I am compelled into the sentiments of old mysteries—that we are, for instance, all children and heirs of one father. How they manage this with triangles *is* a mystery. Such feelings ought to be sweeter than the honeycomb; not to me. To see the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

common in the uncommon, the stars in a sunny sky, birds nesting in my mirror—delusion, delusion, I'm a doomed machine, and can't forget it, although wishing I could. Only in you is there neither renunciation, nor oblivion.

XXVI

July 22

My lover of camelions, it 's no question and was not ever. Other wise. I do n't like him, yet it is easy-er to manager him with pazienze, *atr-am duvaï nob sheen-am* "I think fare well for to-indure-him." He 's so perstant, if I say *duvaï* he 'll-be wosre. And per-haps I have a haunch a bout him... He 's of name Pindola. And, he 's not long-er so crazy as the kite, he 's-become much swettertamperd. There is a reason medicle. A dottor cheque him and learn a "sugre defficiency" in the blood of him. This have-make him very franetic, in other and in de-sire. Now, he eats a milky way each 2 ours and 's angelic, I keep him easy-ly un-der my toe. None of it is much to some point yet I 'll chatt with you until that we met, love. I've no pleasure in the to-ask money, but of-it have, no-more.

XXVII

July 28

They came at eight, bringing my robes, and tongue sandwiches that they urged on me, as supper was not until midnight. Three tart margaritas had put me in good spirits.

The fly was parked outside, with a limousine behind it. I entered the carriage, the others the car. Twice our tandem drove to the great manhole and returned to my dwelling. The third time it stopped at the sewer entrance; I was told to climb out, then blindfolded. One asked me a question I've forgotten, to which I answered, "An expanding economy in an expanding universe." (Giggles.) Another seized me from behind and pressed his thumbs under my shoulder blades,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prodding me toward speech. Dubiously, I opened my mouth: "Ah... um..." The laughter ended, two fingers poked through the blindfold against my eyeballs, for a flash of scarlet and yellow. One took my hand, murmuring, "*Dabar!* Your land journey's over."

There was a clank of metal, I was led stumbling a few steps forward and pushed to my knees. My feet were grasped in turn and placed below the level of the pavement on metal bars. Descending, I counted fifty-two rungs. The air became damp and blessedly cool. I thumped to solid ground as my foot sought the fifty-third rung. A short march forward, to sounds of water faintly splashing, and three steps down onto swaying wood. I was instructed to sit. Others clambered around me in the boat; I felt it glide over the water. "Your sea journey commences." My blindfold was removed.

The sewer light was dim, barely a glimmer on the glazed vault. A voice warned, "Don't play the hinge. One look back ruins everything."

The words frightened me: the Temple initiation imposed the same rule. Was this to be a comparable ordeal? I kicked myself for not bringing my flask, or some pills.

"Make light!"

I thought that the words had been addressed to me, but another voice shouted a reply, and white and black patterns fleetingly crossed the walls ahead.

"Where is the affection called dazzling? Where are the tears?"

Another shout produced a flare, so intense I shut my eyes and beheld matching darkness.

Around me the cries came more rapidly, and the walls blazed with changing lights. The flare's brightness was overrun with a film like blood, then mixed with creamy white, which gave way to purple and umber. New exclamations produced reaches of flame-color and faint yellow; dark blue and pale blue; leek green. The smell remained constant.

We crossed the junction of four waterways. I was told, "These are the Corridors of Proximate Session."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Irritated shouts of "Not this... Not that..." and "Nevermore!" rebounded to us from the lateral sewers.

"Not the voices of ignorance," my companions intoned—

"... not the voices of ignorance but the implosion..."

"... the implosion of language before..."

"Memory..."

The word moaned away down the galleries amid a salad of colors.

As the voices came alternately from either side, I found myself turning toward them. To the left there was a feeling of boundless warmth; to the right, volatile brilliance. Ahead was a dark point where the walls appeared to meet. As the illuminations ended I briefly saw one last image, a sexual tantrum, clear among the damp reflections; then my face was brushed by wet strands, we passed through some veil into a cool, empty light.

We had entered a round widening of the sewer. On one side a broad concrete platform rose from the water. Here an assembly was seated in armchairs. A quiet buzz of conversation was soothing after the shouts.

"You see, no useless ecstasy."

Our boat nudged the wall near steps. We approached the gathering. Heads turned towards us, among them Dexter Hodge's.

"Hello, hello, what a surprise! Didn't expect to see you here. Join us anyway. Sit down."

"Yes, yes," they chorused, "no matter you weren't invited. Drop in any time."

Reassured by the friendliness with which these surprising words were spoken, I settled in the proferred armchair, where I was to remain for an hour. The cushion seemed to have been stuffed with spark plugs, which helped my pious expression.

There were several dozen men, most of them well on, and well-off too. Silence spread among them, until a very old gentleman, able at last to make himself heard, bleated a wordless pitch-tone, then raised his hand and led, still seated, the opening of the Spindle Hymn:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The jester in cap and bells
Swings his bauble, lights the bladder-lamp,
Lets flow the lion's black blood
And opens the locked book
Ornate with scallops and scalene triangles,
Hanorish tharah sharinas.

A podium stood beyond the rows of chairs. From it four Knights delivered brief speeches on "aspects of Spindledom."

The fifth speaker was the Mayor of Miami, Ayer Favell. He is the most popular political figure in the city's history: after twelve years in office, no one yet knows whether he is Democrat or Republican. His apparently extemporaneous speech was pronounced in a leathern, official voice; it dealt with Miami's national obligations as "romance capital." Mayor Favell will once again be a candidate in November, and he did some characteristically metaphysical campaigning. His rhetoric washed pleasingly over me, until at the phrase "degenerate loins" my mind cut loose, wandering among vistas of white and black until it stopped at a constellation of moss splotches on the ceiling, of a green so bright I thought they must be paintings of moss. Sudden cheers from my neighbors brought me back to Mr. Favell. He had just exonerated the Knights from beach taxes.

"Speaking of taxes, you'll be glad to learn that I've had a report from Roger Taxman. But first let me salute others, equally distinguished, who are here tonight.

"The wisest of the wise—Miles Hood." The noted philanthropist rose and bowed. He is about five inches tall. Behind him sat three squat bodyguards.

"That pillar of faith—Silex Jewcett." Mayor Favell had arranged a night's parole.

"A paragon of healing—Dr. Clomburger." He earned his notoriety during our "crazy crab" epidemic.

"Wizard of safety—Peter Jeigh." I did not understand this epithet. The Sovereign pitcher waved his one arm in acknowledgement.

"A whirlwind of prophecy—Dexter Hodge." Mr. Hodge

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked over and patted me on the back. Perhaps he had "prophesied" my admittance. His attention was flattering.

"A well of discernment—Daniel Tigerbaum." I tingled with shame. Dan, that walking snake pit! He was cited only because of our acquaintance.

"That gaggle of tongues—Robert Pindola." Imagine my surprise! This man is an interpreter.

"And now for our wandering Knight, Roger Taxman.

"Roger spent the winter visiting the Algerian province called Little Brittany. Despite its name, the region lies in the Sahara, all empty rock and sand with a few inhabited oases. Arriving in his rented helicopter at one such place, Roger learned that in the waste nearby there was something extraordinary to be seen, and that he *must not see it.* Although as polite and respectful of custom as any Knight, Roger's sense of adventure was aroused. He persuaded his native pilot to help him find the wonder, whose whereabouts he had guessed.

"They started off in that direction, flying in a wide zigzag. Beneath them the tawny sands stretched level as the waters of a bay, until they beheld a large shell-like rock emerging from the flatness. They flew near it. The rock's outer surface was scorched by the sun, but its hollow was shady; and in the shade stood the upright figure of a girl, bound and naked.

"Roger writes, 'I would have thought she were a fictitious shadow of alabaster or other significant marbles, brought to the rock through the artifice of industrious sculptors, had I not seen tears, distinct among the fresh roses and candid privet blossom, bedewing her half-ripe little apples' (that's what it says) 'and the breeze fluttering her tresses.'

"The pilot descended low enough for Roger to make out these details, and the silver chains that fastened the girl to the rock. And then, through the cloud that the chopper was beginning to raise, he saw, as he leaned from the cabin, a monstrous head rise from the sand and take the girl's leg in *his* choppers. The noise of the craft distracted the beast from his prey. It relinquished the white foot and started biting at the shadow moving across the ground. In this manner Roger,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who was unarmed, and who saw the foolishness of meeting the creature empty-handed, lured it some distance away. He then sped back to the oasis.

"Confronting the inhabitants with what he had seen, he learned that the girl was a famous Berber princess, the 'angelical Farah-Sahi.' She had been captured by the local Tuaregs, who had offered her instead of one of their offspring to the Great Sand Snake. Each year the Snake exacted, as the price of sparing the oasis, the sacrifice of a virgin girl, whom he swallowed alive.

"Revolver at hip and rifle in hand, Roger returned to the helicopter. To his dismay the engine failed to start. Leaving the pilot to repair it, Roger found a camel and set out alone. For over an hour he rode, with anxiety burning his heart as fiercely as the sun his head. It was with a cry of relief that he greeted the chained maiden, still uneaten.

"Roger dismounted and approached Farah-Sahi. The Snake poked its head out of the sand. It looked more like a pig than a snake. Roger had only a glimpse of it, for the earth began shaking and the air was suddenly filled with whirling thick sand. The beast had remained, as was its wont, ninety-nine percent underground, and by powerful fillips of its buried tail had churned up a storm.

"Roger lost sight of the rock. He was groping his way through the blistering air when he felt an unpleasant pressure on one thigh. He reached down and encountered the snout of the monster sucking in his leg. The danger passed when the creature, stopped by Roger's crotch, realized its mistake and disgorged the single leg to start over again.

"Roger was determined to dispatch the brute at the next encounter. He knew that in the chaos of the sandstorm he dare not use firearms. So when he felt the Snake's maw seize his ankles, he stuck it through the eye with the hole-punching blade of his Swiss Army knife, then finished him off in the customary manner.

"The air cleared. The broken head of the Snake lolled at the girl's feet. Roger once more put his handy knife to good use, unscrewing Farah-Sahi's chains, and mitigating her thirst

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with an ounce of compressed water.

"Roger tells little about the girl. Evidently overcome by fear, she was reluctant to follow her rescuer. To reassure her, Roger gave her his widower's ring, which she accepted with a smile and swallowed—something that made him very angry.

"They returned to the oasis. Roger learned that after he had left, his pilot started vomiting and soon afterwards succumbed to vomiting fever.

"Scarcely had he heard this news when he and the girl were hauled before a tribal magistrate.

"' I never blowed,' writes Roger, 'whether it was a real or a ritual trial. Its pretext was that tradition had been violated. The magistrate was obsessed with our sense of worthiness. "Which of you can swell his heart with conscious superiority? Is it you, stranger, who thinks, Better I than this animal, this garbage, this *woman*? Or you, Princess, who thinks, Better I than this Christian, this imperialist hireling, this *American*?" But we never learned the answer, because a boy ran in shouting that oil had been struck, and we all went off to see the gusher.'

"And may I suggest," Mr. Favell continued, "that our axiom was ever present in Roger's mind: *Let no man ask what this is, or why this is. He must not say it, he must not say it. For he is a Spindle Knight.*"

Facing me, he declared:

"So to you, new Knight, I turn. Welcome to our crew. I shall not describe your duties; if you were not aware of them you would not be here. Now the portal of Knighthood will open, and you must pay the required toll. To you this will be no sacrifice, since like all of us you are amazed that any man should be smitten by the luster of gold; that men, for whom money was created, could ever be thought of less value than it; or that only because he is rich, a man with no more sense than a stone, and as bad as he is foolish, should have dominion over others. Therefore draw near."

I drew near. The Mayor spoke to me confidentially:

"That's two hundred and ninety-eight dollars."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I swallowed hard and took the pad of blank checks that he held out. (Thank heaven I'd dispatched your money.)

The Knights had resumed their hymn:

What does he hear in the bauble's swing?
What does he see in the lamp's light?
What does he feel in the welling of the blood?
The rune-rife smith at his bellows,
The herald at the gates of noon.
Hanorish tharah sharinas.

While they sang, a curtain behind the podium was slowly raised. Beyond it lay a room eighty feet in length, lighted by a bank of giant spotlights that bisected its ceiling. This was the workshop of the Knights, where their precious Galahad linen was made. A token crew now worked its cumbrous machines.

Following Mayor Favell, I learned the stages of linen manufacture.

At the near end of the shop, a hackler took rough stricks of swingled flax and dashed them into the hackle-teeth of a small ruffer, drawing them through several times, and repeating the procedure with a series of finer-toothed hackles. The tow waste was neatly gathered. A second worker took the clean stricks and pressed them into slivers, a third rolled and twisted the slivers, and a fourth wound these slubbings onto blunt wooden rocks, or distaffs. In the center of the room, apart from her neighbors, sat the spinster, an imperious lady in a trouser suit of silver lastex, holding a distaff in one hand and with the other revolving the spindle against her thigh. The spindle was of tapered green stone, its midpoint ringed with a wharve of gold (or brass.) Other women wound the thread on the bobbins of a handloom, where it was woven into lengths of several yards: bleached, dried, and stamped with a mark, these were piled at the far end of the shop.

We returned to the spinster. I knelt in front of her. She lay down her work, leaned forward, and tapped me on either shoulder with the spindle, saying: "Theah... and theah... I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pronounces you a Knight of the Thimble"—the idiot! After which, casting an amorous glance at the Mayor, she resumed her spinning.

Mr. Favell helped me to my feet and, having kissed me on both cheeks, led me to a wooden construction that faced the spinster: it consisted of a stair of twenty steps on the left, a vertical ladder on the right, and at the summit a narrow platform, on which a music stand was perched, with an open book on its rack.

The Mayor directed me to the ladder with the words: "There you will ascend Happy Mountain."

I did as I was told. Two minutes' hoisting left me breathless and awash. Upright at last on the rickety platform, I withstood an onrush of vertigo by grasping the weighty book. Behind it, fastened to the lectern, a metal stem held a small rectangular mirror, tipped awry. In it I saw one of the ceiling spotlights, extinguished, its lense reflecting the bolts piled below. The markings on the cloth—six black spots like upside-down boots—were vividly magnified by the lamp glass.

The Mayor's voice rose pompously.

"For from the communion of the inner and outer fires, and from their union in the mirror, these appearances must arise.

"For they coalesce on the bright smooth surface.

"For the fire of the eye meets the fire of the face.

"For they are thought to be prime causes, since they freeze and heat."

I straightened the mirror and obtained a sight of my hot face.

"New Knight, you have clomb the Mountain. Read us the lesson there writ."

The open pages were from Petrarch's description of Mont Ventoux; Hannibal splitting the Alps with vinegar was crossed out. I read the passage in a voice small if not still. At the words about Italy—"longing to see my beloved in that country"—I could scarcely speak.

While I read, the company of the Knights filed out on either side of me, singing pianissimo:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The jester in cap and bells
Drops his bauble, quenches the bladder-lamp,
Staunches the blood....

The weavers also left. Alone, I closed the book, descended the stair, and followed the Knights into an adjoining chamber.

They were seated at a long table, at one end of which a place awaited me. Aromas of broth and sauce announced to my convulsed belly that its ordeal and mine were at an end. The menu comprised conch-and-crab soup, filets de flounder "Zeppelin," wild turkey stuffed with Arkansas truffles, and honeydew melon soufflé, with wines to match.

After supper, libations were poured and there were the other usual ceremonies. Then, with the cigars and brandy, a three-piece band came in to play old favorites, and we all had a good time of it, in a sedate way. Dexter Hodge introduced me to the Knights I hadn't met; they regaled me with jokes. (Miles Hood did not stay for supper. Dan had passed out.) After a while there seemed to be continuous group singing.

Hours went by, and it was not until someone did a mimic cockcrow that I knew the night was over. A samovar was brought out. Our numbers were swelled by a gang of sewermen on their way to the compost farms. They broke in on the pretext that we had left the manhole open. They were welcomed, and the party went on with them, although without decorum. Don't think I say this in disapproval of workmen. I was grateful for their presence. All my life I have been a "have-not." At home I was a "have-not." I regard myself as belonging to them.

Drowsiness got the better of me thereafter. I dozed a little, then took my leave. The morning streets shone.

It's taken me hours to write this. I'm beat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PART THREE

XXVIII

August 1

Why, is Pan in-flect? You ask. Once it was n't, then home the missions, be fore soldats and buyrs, monks mad for lingual avance. Yet, hlever, they forse not theyr linguage up on us, ownly show, the vantage of its struttures—of horse, we are peedisposed to these. They show howhow one word can to-be many, with a littlc twits, and we 're reasn-like and order-most and the cort adops this eduhation. Yet in poor villages you hear the old way, in flectsible—they have leash words such you call hualifiers? in place end-ings. Some times the leahs-words be come new in italian-pan. Ex. gr. *nob* was qualify-er makin of noun, a verb, so *lucrim* "food" and *nob lucrim* "aet", now you kno *lucri* is "eat" (as *lucrem* "I eet") and *nob* meen "for" hense *nob lucri* has now a sense "for to et." How ever, you must n't thingk all progross is be causa of occodont maniacs, we do our-own. So *ticbaï* meaned firts "run-ing from" and now "in face of, confront with"; and like wise the antic sense is not oll losst, in my willage *ticbaï laï* is "in flight of mud" but in the capatal "con front-ed of mud". This is mud-heavil, under the moonsoon.

Mean while I work since middle-june at MAP, that is: Mediceo avanti il Principato, the arhive of the Medici is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thousand of bundles, and looking in to them, I 'm go-ing nutty.

You may think, my gioy in your knit-ness is that I 'm Mrs. Knight, or you are like Roger Tax and un-screw me from the roc of my father, but it is n't, onely my brother with all truist joy my mind is fill seeping in this way and that way and two more way, and up, dwon, and to the sides, so every where it seep in every hting this mind ricc with altruest joy, mind open-ing, mature, and with graet lac of dis like and diswish.

I live in a quite pension (yet not all meels, but bred-&-brekfast.) My friend is the lone-ly chamber maiden. She 's name of Calli, the land-ing lady is Signora Videcca, who 's so please-full and many say, she is a holy, but Calli is un-sure. Nice, but only since Calli works very? Halli says me, "We shall see, howhow nice she 's in truth." One morn-ing, she stays in bed. "Why this?" Signora Videcca aks. "Oh, no thing." Sig. Videcca not replie, onely her eye broughs touch one-each-other.

I shall not, no, tell to the polize the mud-like deeds of Pindola.

XXIX

August 6

After weeks of marooning I'm back in Mapdom. It's dull. Staring at the walls of my cupboard-size office, I approach annihilation in the perception of their near sameness—they are not the same, but almost the same; yet there can be no question of like or unlike because they are nothing; and I fuse into their nothingness. Why do Tibetans find this so hard?

Hodge has been a disappointment. Ever since my initiation he has been busy. I did manage to see him once, but to no avail, since we were not alone—after my sixth phone call, Mr. Hodge suggested I lunch with him at a diner in the area of the Ten Towns, where he was going on business; and there he showed up in the company of one E. Pater Kabod. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

latter was an unattractive old man (no doubt a Temple customer): deaf, uninterruptibly verbose, and a compulsive spitter. He talked through the meal. First he discoursed on spitting, an essential hygiene according to him, whose neglect gave rise to noxious deposits of tartar on the teeth—tartar being as poisonous as arsenic, and the accumulation of venom in the mouths of snakes being due to their inability to spit. Next he warned us about the big con, showing more concern for its practitioners than for its victims. Mr. Kabod salted his talk with hypocritical pericopes such as: "It's impossible to slake one's thirst for the absolute with the possession of created things." I'm sure he would love to try.

Since this lunatic had only half an hour to spare, I hoped to corner Mr. Hodge over coffee and Havatampas. But the old man was replaced by Hodge's Tax Disclaimer, and my lunch break ended.

Grace just called to tell me, with a smarmy lack of glee, that her date at my June party has become a "romance." She "wanted my advice." Indeed. I was astonished by the grotesque echo of old times. That daughter of Saturn belongs to my cavern days, when I lived in chaos, leashed to the under wall of the globe, drinking primitive mercury and feasting on myself. To speak of my life I need two past tenses now, one for that black past which is over, one for the time that began when you stripped my scales.

Your benediction of my knighthood is undeserved. As for your accoster, do as you think best; but remember, it's a mistake to comfort our enemies at our own expense. And in future, be careful not to rumble me so: your words can excite my suspicion as violently as they do better passions. The fault lies in my character, not in your provocation—you will have to forgive me that, my sweet raggle.

XXX

August 9

I feel I am as one in Sah Leh Kot is *ticbaï laï*, but it 's not mud

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I come-front, but *tharaï ghanap*, end-less hours: 388. Of them I comb small friuts. I han not learn from Mediceo avanti il Principato, it 's called MAP, it near-ly drive me nut, what happen then to the tresure? Yet a bout thirtytime one say any thing of it a mong business letters and letgers from the two Medici-teams. These, from '400 to '443. The team of *Averardo di Francesco* al-ways say, the treasure owes come to us. The team of *Giovanni de Bicci* of horse respond, no thing to do. These ones, all though, do n't try to sell-it. There is a letter whewhere *Cosimo di Giovanni* ask *Francesco di Giu-liano Averardo* ('41): why, do n't we soppress the busuness, you and I banks have much cash, al-so the clippings are no more to use than thousands pistol-balls with out one pistol. This mean, the clip sin is still attacc to them. *Averardo*† 1434, his son *Giuliano*† '36, grand son *Francesco* †'43, there is no grand-grand son. Then the bank and propriety are home to *Hosimo*. There fore, it should end, how ever does n't. The libri segreti go on-till 1450, the treasor is yet a problem. One can knot know, why? Other ways, all these Medici were friend-most. Re-mind your self, the taem of *Averardo* is as politicians ever be-side the other, to sostain.

Lasttime I have wrote of Calli, my friend and the chamber-ess, howhow she is test-ing the saintlity of Signora Videcca. Calli has thought: she seem saint only be cause of my to-work thus well, yet be neath, she 's tuff. And Calli a-gain a morn-ing rest inbed. Halli, Halli, calls La Videcca.—Si signora?—Why to get up your self so late?—Oh, no thing.—No, nothing? bad girl, her mistruss crys, with let-ing her angr scope in speach.—Then Calli suggest me: A ha, see, she 's not so gentle, I 'll prove her a gain one-ce. (I simpattize.)

Think much, much of you, after your 2 pages tendre & measurd. Cars like your's, give a lurch in my core. The heated weather foster keen-est rimembranzes. *Wey* for all seas be-tween! *Lemum, sheenam*—I love, I dure.

Yestoday I encunter Sig. Pindola to tak tea at Piazzale Gadda. Be fore, a slick car stops, in to it walk a man with shoes of snake, and my freind say, It is Prince Voltic— know, he 's trusted with sell of lost heritage of Medici. I re mane stil still, one-ly in my cup the water rinkles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XXXI

Augusto 12

My feel *ticbaï laï* was not *tharaï*, so end-less, the mud have crack, out cames not moths but, the prince! And for this I write, yet with out the to-wait of your risponds, O Twang preg, this be no crime a-gaints oxidental letters-cutsom. Thus the Pindola walk with Twang a cross the green-less piazza with the tower fist-most, then "Good day prince," "Good day!", "Know you my friend...?" and emit my name, I tell to you, my courtsey so low as stretch-er cat, "What esquisite!", they talk of we shall-have cup to-gather, "Ciao," "Ciao." Think, his grand powr of Medici facts and odjects: I 'll have that.

There come too a smal-er help, from Mr. de Roover, all-ready you know, in Rome he toll of clip-ings and of *Otto di Guardia*. He is a-work in MAP, have for 20 years and still there is thirteen bundles to esamin. (Of 166.) So, I see him day and day, we put on our coffee brakes to gether, some time he have me to home to a lunch in near-from trattoria. A gain he helps—he has, a most-interest-full hump a-bout whawhat happen after 1443. Sure, *Cosimo* in-herit the proprety of of-*Averardo* great-son but bank-parts and land-parts, and there is, no patricolar things. Later (says Mr. de Roover) we shall note the regreg of *Clarice de' Medici*, as the celebrete "Resurrection Ring" by *Baroncelli* not have-became theirs, the want to give it to of-her not-yet dauhgter-by-law *Alfonsina*, and that ring made for *Giuliano di Averardo* 1430. In like-mode *Piero the Gotty* ask in 1460, where is, not to-us, the pori-tratt of *Francesco di Giuliano*, that *Alesso Baldovinetti* have paintit? A-long with referenzes to treasure after '43, these re-marks have the de Roover esteam, there is to-have-be a-nother heir. This appare so like-ly, I'm not sure how it can be true. How ever the-less it's sure, the wife of *Francesco* dies with no child.

It is to-note, a new indress on flip of this letter. I was needed to move, after Calli 's last proof-ing Signora Videcca. A-gain late in her bed, and answer "Nothing" to "For what?" Then la Videcca take pin and stroke Halli. It is, the pin to roll-ing pasta. And blood leep from of-Calli head, then she run with blood into street and gry, "Look, look howhow she 's a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saint!" Thus Sig. Videcca have lost a riputation, also Calli the post as clean-maiden, and, evidently, I like her hompanion goes, too.

I dreamed strange-ly last-night. I have walk down to the river, and seek to ride a-way on a little boat. This, is fasten to a tree yet not by rope, but a metal piece, and lotckd by knot-and-bolt. The knot is gold and it is shin-ing like sunfire on pool, I turn up on it and han-not un-scrue it. A new glow is be-hind me, I look, it 's a monk, old & strong, yet his head is n't shave nor face. He does the glow, soon to fade, until he speak, "It is *knot* gold!" and the glows de-part, finally at that they're no thing. The barc is float a way evening on the water. —I han not think, is the monk a true monk? is he a *pristwe?* (a demon)

XXXII

Aug. 13

Your new facts suggest such a chronology as this. After Boniface IX had commissioned him to seize Todao's treasure, Averardo asked Giovanni di Bicci to do the job for him. Giovanni found that while the clipped gold was great in weight, it was unnegotiable. So he cut his losses by settling with Messer Todao for a smaller sum in cash, released the treasure, and canceled the Pope's debt. No one but Averardo was the worse off. Messer Todao transported the hoard to his abbey, where he hid it in a chest of silk, and died without disposing of it: it lay untouched until the later abbot's discovery. Meanwhile, in respect to Averardo, Giovanni began the long dissimulation that his family was to maintain after his death, not daring to admit the breach of faith to cousins who were such staunch political allies.

All day long—it is sunset now— I've been haunted by a dream I had early this morning. It began with my lying wounded in a street—the street where the truck knocked me down. I stared at a wall whose surface was being slowly lettered over, the inscription indecipherable but Gothic in aspect. The letters started shining. I looked about. Behind me a man in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saffron robes was dismounting from a caparisoned horse. He was tall, sturdy and saturnine, with coppery skin, incandescent white hair, and black eyes.

The old man approached; his radiance faded. He set me astride the horse, then led me down an unfamiliar way. Presently he said, "A horse is a vain thing for safety. I'll take you to an inn." We stopped in front of a dark building, into which he carried me as though I were a puppy. The interior dissolved in deep browns. Light dwindled from high pointed windows; piles of manure were heaped in corners; there was a cadaverous smell. The old man settled me on a low bench and prepared a potion for my wounds. "You'll want some cascara... natural sulfur... an inch of worm spittle..." The mixture tasted like chewed paper. The old man stood over me and shouted, "Now do you know who I am? A hint: my initials are D.W. So, D.W....? D.W....?"

He removed his robe, under which he wore only jockey shorts and sneakers. His hefty body was the same color as his face. He lay down and began caressing me. Each caress discovered chinking coins along the ridges of my body, which he tucked into his shorts, mumbling "Gold in prison" or "Expenses." His beard was moist. "You don't object to paying your debts. You're no Pogy O'Brien," he said, extracting more coin. Becoming bored, he sighed "Nevermore," and left me for a brass salver heaped with macaroons, which he swallowed with gluttonous majesty. After a moment he paused:

"You call yourself a scorner of contingencies, but it's time to grasp history by its nettle-like stalk."

There was a sound of durable materials splitting, as an invisible levee cracked. Water flowed into the church.

The effect on the old man was organic. In moments the smooth consensus of his limbs gave way to pathetic marasmus. "Ah, my cancer!" he wailed. The waters rose quicker. "This my king's tomb?" he said, subsiding among them. A cascade of mascara darkened his face. "That explains those eyes of his!" I gazed on the silvery foam, expecting Venus or the Rhine Maidens to rise from his bubbles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This afternoon brought the microfilm from Montpelier. I'll look at it tonight. I could use help these days. The computer is now denied me, commandeered by the police. Hodge remains as inaccessible as ever. For a whole week the heat and humidity have been in the nineties; I feel as though I were too.

Write soon and brighten the long day's journey. I note the improvement of your English with pride.

XXXIII

August 20

To Lorenzo de' Medici. Complaint of Guillaume Abbot of Montpelas. How the Abbot was knowingly defrauded by Lionetto di Benedetto Lorenzo's agent. How the Abbot was much impoverished and the Medici's honor sullied.

Should the Abbot Guillaume not have expected to gain more than he gave? His hopes were not drawn from common rumors that the chest of silk was of great worth. He believed the tacit support that Lionetto agent of the house of Medici, and his associates, gave such rumors. And I cite as example one of these Benedetto di Gianfranco, who all know to be Lionetto's intimate. When he visited the Abbey to buy wine, he spoke to the Abbot of certain lots of Florentine silk that were for sale. Was the Abbot wrong to hint at the purchase of a certain chest when he was given satisfactory information and his precise hopes were encouraged? He then endeavored to transact with Lionetto himself but could not be received, yet had a letter assuring Lionetto's compliance in the affair. It is a misfortune that this letter was returned at the insistence of Lionetto's representative after the sale was finally carried out and the false goods delivered. Messer Lionetto has now rebuffed Guillaume's just complaints because "the Abbot failed to transact with Lionetto himself, who had postponed important matters in Avignon expressly for the Abbot's business." What? The Abbot was to blame? Guillaume

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was not to blame (nor Lionetto. Yet it was he who chose that wild meeting-place.) I was traveling through the borderlands when my journey was interrupted. Just before the solitary village at Pont d'Eulh ten men apparently lepers suddenly came among us. Profiting from our revulsion they seized our horses by their bits and bridles then made us dismount. They were thieves and no lepers and quite nonchalantly plundered myself and my three monks. They took the money we carried to pay for the silk and rode off with our horses. Two hours passed before we found some slowfooted asses and thus we came late to the meeting with Lionetto. He to my dismay had just departed, having instructed his men that in his absence the sale of the silk was to be deferred, and this was a great misfortune. Needless misfortune, for Messer Lionetto himself has since told me that payment could have been made on a later day, in view of the wretched theft of my money, but no words would move his men. Such a waste! I could only submit. I watched the silk being reloaded. Great lengths of brocade were folded into the chest. The regret of the moment has not lessened, for since then my eyes have never seen such a quantity of brocade...

I've done this much of the microfilm, which is the pure quill: the draft of a letter to Lorenzo the Magnificent by the sixth Abbot. (Yours was the second and mine the seventh.) Its date is 1483 at the latest. I've pruned the text of its flourishes, which clutter every sentence: "...What I say is this, a covenant was validated, it cannot be invalidated.... My lord, do not forget the lives of poor men, do not forget the appeals of those who address themselves to you...."—on and on.

It isn't hard to guess whom the ten thieves were working for.

Thanks for your informative letters. I hope you meet the Prince again. But is it wise to see so much of this De Roover? Just who is he? I must counsel you to restrain your trust of strangers. It's not only that you may risk our secrets: you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot guess the sexual effect a twist like you has on men of the west, especially intellectuals. I'm concerned, too, that you may not be getting enough to eat, or the right kind of food—is that why you have lunch with him?

Months have passed since I was last with you. I have only your hammock photograph to caress. I want to smell and touch you. The waning summer fills me with gloom. Two hands in their circular mimicry of pursuit cannot dissemble the face behind them that in deadly earnest hunts us down.

XXXIV

Agost 23

Now, it 's sun and quite noise come from the streets, yet 20 minutes fore it were blacc thnunder and light-ing. Twang was very frighted to squat under my table for work near library windows, I feel, a *pristwe* comes after me. It is the same demon as your draem, much water after the flash. I think many times, a flash have a no less shortlife than mustard seed on arrowtip.

Mr. de Roover is sicure, so nice, he was profossor of histery at the college "Brooklyn," now retires, yet not from terribiles bundles of MAP (in fun.) And with Mrs. de Roover, she 's name of Firenze! They 're delihate to Twang. And she 's too a enorme to-know of old ehonomix, have wrote Glossary of Mediaeval italian Buziness Terms, so beuatifull, I 've not can work with out that, and when I am first gave her hand with "Good day" I was timid timid, yet soon I prey for her author-graph. In change I write her a catalog of business terms Pan and Lao. They have age, to a bout 65 years.

Your are not to think, does Twang ate what is good? Any food is a nough. And this 's need-ing no virtu, all things are ease-most, they are *nob-lemum* (for that I love.)

So the Pindola accompany me to the Prince's. We slip a ice-full drink on his terraze and be-hold low houses. Pindola have said, "The Twang know much a-bout those Medici," the Prince then: "May be, that she will say any thing of their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brank in Lübeck?" Twang: "O, no, it is no branch, that Gherardo Bueri and some, it is only corispondents for the bank," I tell of Gutkind's wrong-ing. The Principe Voltic look at me a dozen sehonds and then he give me a new drink.

XXXV

August 27

I'm wretched at having snapped at you about Mr. de Roover. I should have known better. I did know better—it's another case of my nature besting my intelligence. Who can approve of quarrelsomeness, contentiousness, envy, ambition, or drinking bouts? The trouble is, there's no law to uphold the imperatives of the moral will. One nails down one's bad habits on the nearest board and drags it behind, a useless brake of remorse.

I'm sending extra cush, because I don't want you eating just "any food."

Here's the Essential Remainder of Abbot Guillaume's lament. Authentic though the document may be, it's fishy. Not because it contradicts my last hypothesis and, more important, the account in Amortonelli's letter: there the chest in the abbey *did* contain the treasure. (Notice that both lots of silk were marked with "six ravens"; they have their importance. The Abbot had only to glimpse them to accept the goods. He writes of "seeing in that blazon my shield, erring in this, for it was a Medusa's head to petrify me.") The story as a whole seems crow. Why should Lionetto, high placed in the Medici bank, go off into the countryside to hopscotch like a common grifter?

> Messer Lionetto then wrote he would deliver the silk to the Abbey, but he would not himself accompany it because of the distance, and he was occupied with many pressing matters, so he entrusted the goods to the said Benedetto di Gianfranco, who later claims that he only followed Lionetto's orders, and this is perhaps no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lie, but how is he to be believed when he says that he knew nothing about the contents of the chest, which was most certainly of the proper size (six men lifted it scarcely), on its lid the three fish were roughly cut, when they opened it it seemed to be filled with the brocade that I had seen folded into it at the first meeting, and how should it enter the mind of a man of God, transacting with the representative of one of the greatest princes of Christendom, that the chief weight of the chest was a sheet of lead fitted into its base, or that the brocade once it was unfolded was not the six hundred *bracci* [about 380 yds] agreed on but a mere twenty *bracci* long, although the peculiar design of sea shells and spiny roses was the same as before, but underneath this brief sample was plain taffeta, as I later discovered, too late, and above all too late for redress because of the manner whereby the fraud was compounded, and yet I look beyond these wiles to the honor of their master whose glory is so unjustly smirched, to have his name affixed to a receipt for the delivery of "620 *bracci* of brocade & taffeta" where no specification was made of the proportion between the two kinds of silk, and the point was passed over by me because it had been explained that taffeta would be used to wrap or pad the brocade to keep it clean and dry, but it was no padding but the bulk of the consignment, which I did not then verify, and concerning this you will ask, why? My lord, I was stupefied by joy and fear. Joy when the chest was opened, at the sight of the brocade with the six ravens stamped on its first fold; fear lest this prize be lost to me, for I could not think that Benedetto would leave it to me if he observed what I did. And so it was after a mere glance that I gave my approval, ordered the chest shut, paid the price, signed the receipt. The chest was born to an attic of one of the abbey buildings, and fearing that any precipitation would arouse the curiosity of my monks I waited for night, I had had the chest carried to an attic in an outlying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

building, and at last I opened it, only then I discovered the subterfuge, but Benedetto was beyond recall....

Frenzied resentment here overwhelms the text. There is one further point of interest: the Abbot mentions having earlier rendered Lionetto a service, when "Fortune enabled me to return his purse of jewels." Had Lionetto prepared his victim by having him "find the leather?"

Guillaume was on shaky ground. In buying the silk, he expected to be getting more than his money's worth, so much more that—remember the ten thieves—he paid for it twice. It was awkward for him to complain of duplicity. No doubt because of this he followed the advice of his clerk, who appended to the draft:

> At the suggestion of Brother Peregrine, scribe, the Abbot has witheld this letter, believing in the end that it would bring small advantage to the Abbey, or none.

Life here continues boring, except for the headlines. The *Sun-Examiner* has trotted out the most terrifying type you ever saw: each letter is as tall as Wee Willie Keeler. Why should the Chinese want to bomb Mars? True or not, the news has happily muted our nation's "clamors of salvation in the tents of the righteous."

As for your apprehension of thunder and lightning, that is an instinctive terror; there's no squelching it. What about your Buddhist disciplines? I'm sending you money with this because I don't want you eating just "any" food.

XXXVI

August 30

To-tell Prince Voltic a bout Lübeck appear, it pleases him, he waste hours search-ing after Medici-tracces there and now not long-er, mercy mine. For thus reason he send yester-day, a thank, a censer, done of agrent, with in-it any twigs of in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense, it 's of the '600, littl-est, "for home-use."

Pindola harry that gift. With pleasure: for that if the prince love Twang, to love Pindola more. Bonzo wishs to-will-work for the Prince. Now he do the manucurust, or say womanacure? It 's with a for-woman barber all all day. And he will to-say *duvaï* to the work, of-it he is have enough, and who will not? aftre 15 yaers (or even, fivteen minutes.)

Yet Bonzo (Pindola) have took high way with Twang, as he will say, I Pindola gift to you Prince. No no. I never kiss that hand. He is will-hiss my foots!! It shall, to be in vert! And how? There will to-be a accidente, all most, I do it, then I salve the Pindola. He 'll kiss under feets of Twang.

I will know, please, the little english speech for "there" and "to-it" as in-italian *ci*? In Pan too it 's *nam*, can slid in aesy, be-tween breethes.

O froget, that rebite a bove de Roover, there was n't sorrow in the core of Twang, but warm-ing of fire soup, for it was sweet the brain-less gelosy. Abbracc thee, *lemu*, in my thoght.

XXXVII

September 3

A happy surprise has broken my dull round—days of getting out of bed not knowing whether I'm dead or alive (or feeling both dead *and* alive); the depressing station at the bathroom scale; office hours; equally tedious maps; a solitary movie after supper (yesterday *Guileless Swallows*). All is made bearable by the knowledge that you exist. I try to recognize signs of you in the trash of my life, from the morning paper to the book over which I fall asleep. I take the rest on faith.

And out of the blue, Dexter Hodge called up to invite me to a "choice" houseparty at the Beach. After weeks spent trying to see him, I was stunned; but there is no point expecting consistency from that busy man. For the outing he has taken over the Na Inn, a beautiful motel at 183rd Street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I don't know what the program is, but with Mr. Hodge in charge it'll be the Carrie Watson. There will be celebrities, and a basketful of fashionable cupcakes. (Fashionable now means layers of Minoan overskirts beneath unveiled tops—a perplexing hot-and-cold effect.) There should be ample opportunity to discuss treasure hunting.

As for Mr. de Roover, I'm touched by your words. You have forgiven me too readily for me to forgive myself.

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent for *ci*, *nam*, or the French *y* in English.

Ever since you arrived in Italy I've wanted to ask you about an essential east-west distinction, that is, the sun—so different from your steamy heat-and-light machine, efficient but remote. It is sometimes like that in our northern cities; but in Florence, as here, isn't it intensely present, like a rampant lion, or a wielded sword flashing among us?

XXXVIII

6. sett.

The incidente was donc. In this month one is making new store the Palazzo Rucellai, of-it the face is blind with bords and tube. I rent 2 work men there, one, on low baord, one at-top. Bonzo is walk-down that street, it is whewhen he 's under board I hry a cross the street and run to spin him out from harm way in to door way, then the low man spill a big brigk on whewhere Bonzo were to be. This is not a far drop and when it had have stroke Bonzo it shall have n't kill him, or hard-ly. But, now we regard a-bove, it is the high man cry and hand-shakes as although he just drip the brick, and this was the Bonzo's thought. He sit-down as a doll, I remember you before the apples truck, I was very hard not to-laugh. He call Twang many times *neng! neng!* (bellezza) and I think only on my material-subtile nose to downpush laughing. Then I say, poor tresure! he must to-eat the best lunch, and I 'll pay it, and all so a graet dottor lest he 's hurt-ing and Twang shall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pay, of horse I know, he 'll not let this. And to day Bonzo think, I have save him and 'm rich, my hands are the cage and he is the inside bird. The worker men costed $3 and 2 kiss.

Florence town is more empted. It is not a worse for this. But there is a delight here now, for the dipartures. A strong spirit home to me of indolenze, I have the wish to see none one, to say no thing, to do so, and I have a desire of noth—o yes, I desire you and all though I can n't, then, to read you. *Wuc mau nam theu*, as were we here! (it mean, "would";) to-gather in the streat of warms stones.

Do not you feel some pain in that errore to ward de Roover, do fore-give your self, for my mind follow your pain and then foregive-ing, full of hompassion, this way (pain) and that-way (forgive) and again an other and another-way, a bove, and below, and every way around, pierc-ing the wrold ever full of compassion, so my mind would be a broad, spreadout, beyond the frames and esempt of harted and bad will-ing.

Bonzo tell me, to day is the first day of the Jews Year, No. 5733, he say they are so good at suffer-ing, look at how long they have practice. Is this funny?

XXXIX

September 10

I'm sitting in a Loretta-Youngish bedroom, my bare toes linked in ringlets of angora, gazing at the Atlantic over the space bar of a mighty typewriter that is equipped with fully integrated circuits and pigskin keys. The machine, so rapid that inscription precedes thought, was delivered at my request for "a" typewriter. I used it for my map notes. But I changed to the seriousness of ink to address you. Deep sentiments flow more readily from a pen than from the most responsive keyboard, the McCaltex longhand block notwithstanding.

We've been at Na Inn since Friday afternoon and are to leave Tuesday morning. It's very nice. Under the inn's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bungaloid exterior lurks a small palace. The windows of my bedroom, thirteen feet high, are shaded by sun-sensitive sheet-coral blinds. The common rooms are both grand and intimate, thanks to lighting and sound systems that adjust to their use. At their center lies an enormous game-room-cum-swimming pool, whose breadth and length and heighth and depth I can hardly grasp and cannot begin to describe. At the bottom of the pool, night and day, what seems to be real fire flares into the water. One guest, Peter Jeigh, a powerful swimmer, dove to investigate. He said the flames were warm but did not hurt.

The guests I had already met are Peter, Dr. Clomburger, and Lester Greek. I knew others by name, Wolfgang Abendroth for instance. All are remarkable men, answerable to none but themselves for their eminence. The one disappointing absence is that of Miles Hood.

Early Friday evening a few of us played poker. I did so well that I considered turning out as card sharp. My biggest pot was at five card stud. I won with three kings. Mr. Hodge tried to bluff me with four cards to a straight, but I stuck it out and he threw in his hand. Toward the end, a new arrival was announced and we decided to have some fun: when Peter Jeigh's turn came to deal he would play him for a chump, using the rest of us as shills. A deck was "cooled" so that I would be dealt four tens and the stranger four nines.

The latter entered and took his seat. He was handsome, with a fixed smile paralleling his new-moon beard, whose luster perhaps betrayed a dyer's tinge. Play resumed; he was allowed to win a few hands. He enjoyed the game and tossed in his money like hay. The cold deck was introduced; I drew to my four tens and bet up the pot; but when we showed, the mark held four jacks! "Goddam it!" Peter roared, "that's not the hand I gave you." The other replied, "You have to play smart to beat Roger Taxman." He was still swarthy from Africa.

After another round of cocktails we went in to dinner. I was walking toward the foot of the table when Hodge stopped me. "Friend, you don't belong down here, come and sit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by me." It was a glorious meal. I had three helpings of the main course, a braised stuffed-and-rolled shoulder of lamb pie. Over the double consommé Mr. Hodge gave his reasons for bringing us together: his respect for inner, even hidden worth, his contempt for the vanity of the world. Afterwards each of us tried to justify his remarks. Dr. Clomburger recalled an early triumph, his original description of yeast frenzy; Lester Greek spoke of new gleanings from *Finnegans Wake*—the palindromic precedence of "Eve" over "Anna"—soon to be published in his study, *The Confidential Walrus*; I discoursed on the abstract beauty of maps. So it went round the table. The evening ended with a swim.

The next days were full of sports and games. Needless to say, when faced with anything rougher than shuffleboard I withdrew to my room. Mr. Hodge has agreed to a treasure talk when we drive home tomorrow.

I admire the way you made sport of Pindola; but why bother?

Your sweetness, your immeasurable sympathy has again left me bewildered. Don't worry about my foolish sufferings —they are only feeble tributes to you.

XL

September 13

I can 't know, why is pokre? So a mild game, I once watch at aerport, the men are roug but in the play of mildmost charity. They yeild their dollors corteosly, only when they have lose, they smile. Yet with win-ing, they shake their haeds and appare so stern with their selves, as pumished. Of where come this beauty? Or is it but that they think, Happy with the cards, unhappy with love (I heared so one luagh), so stranger for in Pannam it is n't thus. A man can to-be happy, with both. Pans say, A mountain apple in one hand, a stream eel in the left hand.

It may be, Bonzo 's good card actor, for he is be-gin to regard Twang like my dog. And now he 's also talk talk, and I almost ywan then he said, the Prince sholl owe to-have me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bonzo, for the family Pindola have-be guardian of some properity from the Medici. When? (I yawn *not.*) O a bout 1466 and after. Who Medici? I serch, to think hohow I breath. O any "ulterior discendents" (?) of: Averardo. I count down, to twentyone. Then: I think, the of-Averardo descendens are no one in 1466. O I do n't know, we onely keep these things be-cause, they are history-hurious. So what things? Chairs and chaists. Chest? 1 or two, on-them they are the *palle*, or Medici balls, as of tradition, but them alas and no— Here I think near by to surest-ness that he will have-say *pesci* fish and yet make "e" last enough to be home *pesche* peaches. He ajjoin: "I mean, people some time think they 're peachs, they 're giust balles." After, he shuts the mouth. It is, he think his affechion mine under his discretions.

Now baby you will se why to "bother" my Bonzo, he 's be come such an interestfull chap. As the Prince of hourse. There-fore I press a gainst them, I 'll be a leech in side their hears and out-suck the middle secretes of those brains. Then I shall vomit-them-out, *uüaxm!* Thus, *naï sheenam slop*, thus, I bear benaeth un-happiness, untill I 'm ever for yours, *me tharaï pheu*, I say the Pan words, sweet like the milk in cans, in to the bolster 's damp patch at each night, lonesone lonesone. Please, be a-sure of my utter-est and rimorse-less devozion.

XLI

September 17

Your interpretation of poker is slightly wide of the mark. It is not the players but you who are charitable. Perhaps there is a show of self-effacement in winning—perhaps we apply "funeral manners" to conceal the vindictive glee.

Speaking of gambling, I saw a compatriot of yours playing faro bank at the Casino: General Kavya. He was twisting the tiger's tail with a pluck he never showed in the field. They were dealing them at fifty dollars a card and he punted on every turn. Has he been thrown out of Pan-Nam for swindling? Or was he sent to cruise our military establishment?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What a fate, when he could have stayed in his province, a big tail-wagging fish in that lovely little pond! The second alternative seemed likelier. The General was accompanied by a U.S. Army captain, who held his parabolic sword and was apparently abetting his play. Standing behind the dealer, the captain fiddled with several tiny coins (antique khrots?), clinking them in irregular, precise rhythms. I'm sure he was tipping the cards: Kavya kept an ear cocked in his direction. Otherwise the General did credit to his country, sheathed in silks and caiman skins. His only weak point was a large Maltese cross that flapped on his tummy, looking very Woolworthy among the tribal chains. I wanted to introduce myself as a Pan-by-marriage, but he was absorbed in his gaming.

Next morning Mr. Hodge and I drove into town together. I raised the subject of treasure-hunting. Mr. Hodge responded with a monologue on the legal problems that attend the disposal of treasure-troves. His deluge of words kept me speechless.

A perplexing incident interrupted the lecture. Our car had been slowed to walking speed by the throng near the Bass Museum. (Moreau's "Medusa of the Lilies" is on exhibit, and for three weeks that end of Collins Avenue has looked like London Bridge in "The Waste Land.") As we crawled along, Mr. Hodge pointed to a group near my window: Miles Hood, preceded by his roly-poly bodyguards and followed by a thin, stooped figure, who as we watched gave the famous millionaire a push, then with bewildering precision severed his attaché case from its gripped handle and slid away with it into the crowd.

I turned towards Hodge. He looked at me expectantly, snorted, and pushed me out of the car. I felt myself being shoved through the slow-moving pack, and before I had had time to resist or complain, I found myself face to face with the thief. My own astonishment was mirrored for a second in his eyes; then he dropped the case and fled.

"Grab it and we'll split." Hodge said. "We'll see Miles later. No point staying and getting our names in the papers."

In fact we did not return the case. Mr. Hodge asked me to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep it until he could make an appointment with Hood—"If he was carrying it himself it must be valuable." I've not heard from him since.

Now from the groaning board it's back to the groaning scale, and the other tediums. Only your letters delight me. I keep them scrupulously filed (this is one reason why you must be sure to date them) so that I may follow your progress in English, something that gives me pride and pleasure. The letters bring torment also. They plunge me into lust. My beloved, write me about your body. Remind me of it with new words. I rehearse the same memories over and over. Only you can renew them—you *must* renew them, repetition is a death of love. I wish I could persuade you that what I say is true.

XLII

September 20

The Prince Voltic will go in to the Mugello, at some low mounts with health. With him, Bonzo and Twang follow, as ask-ed? It is a worth-most travel, I be-leave, and also there I 'll study and think-up my hunts in MAP. If you will admit so, I must pray, Twang need a little money.

Twang can nots think, words to make love to sur-vive, when it is n't to be made, words of lust make it then any time to death. It is it that sing a poem in my distrect, of a tigr, whiwhich be gin

Thus of love (a) miseria (is) alas mud

like that begins all sad poem a-bout love, and can you n't catch the Pan words, *naï lemö slop wey laï*?

Thus of love a misery (is) alas mud.
A tigre hurry to the edge of the forest.
He sits behind a bread tree and chews bitter leafs—
his belly's tough of hunger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A monkey comes. O monkey
I'll swallow your gentile meat
then make your tail as hat,
the tiger sing it, the monkey have go.

Here 's a peehock. O pee cock
I 'll chew each little-twig bone
then I spit your piumes in to the breezes,
the tiger sings this, the pecock al-ready have goe.

There is a buffala. O water buffalo
I 'll knaw aroung your schine and top leg
I'm dainty, not a house of ants,
The tiger sung, and the buffalo is gone.

The tiger rest at the edge of a forest
very dead of this much sing.
Now there are but these ants in his belly, too late,
but they, hurry out his eyes through his dentals

What is that "Waste land"? It 's perhaps a nick name of Arizona?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frank Lima

Poem

My brother
fixed his new
cufflink
to ride the lightning
for murder
and Mom ironed
his clothes
for summer camp

You know how
fussy he is

this morning smelled
liked burned hair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beach

There
happy as a green fly
toes popping out
like corks in the sand
Buddhas on stilted chairs
ocean tattooed with
bathing caps
mud castles
sea shell windows
and sun glasses staring
at the panty-blue sky
webbed seaweed
windblown
brown
on an eel-green
bottle

On the meat line
sunsprays of iodine
on fish-white backs
wide splits
heavy squats with cat whiskers
I'm the ocean between their legs
my toetips cling to the sea shore
sea gulls whirlpool in my hair
and sing in my windy ear

O Beach
heaven of dark eyed belly buttons
you tricked-off the sea shell
for Trojan-floats & beer cans.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lewis Warsh

There is a bed

that is far away

& I will sleep in it again

some day

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Splitting

I am there.
I can imagine
myself.

I can do anything.

It is good to be clear.

Otherwise, I am thinking.

I can
be loving.

A future, next time around.

Next face.

Tired.

Separately.

There is
I was inspired to

I am not
who you
think.

Abuse, peace,
when someone asks, gives.

There was a reason.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I came, went.

Asking's a pleasure.

My mind
changes constantly.

It doesn't hurt.

What was
no longer is

I can
go home.

Everything matters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

David Henderson

Canticle for the Cambridge Jug Bands

to P.

1.

i put on yr forgotten sweater
to cherish the cold breezes
that steal into my room
i wd be sitting where the candle burns
atop the tumultuous table
the radio of pacifica plays
joan baez she is in juarez

2.

i see north country trees
blue green sky and grass
the low planes
of the horizon
on the eye
frames of houses
an overcoat a fashion
for towns that live
and die

3.

so this is for if
the lines of tide
spin us away
and we hold to
each other only in photo
or the gesture of a dream
in technicolor sleep
as if the numbers
of our address
disappear out of a hat
some deft hand mojo
of time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Plot

Joyce Carol Oates

Given: the existence of X.

Given: the existence of myself.

Given: X's obsessive interest in me.

Given: the universe we share together, he and I, which has subsided into an area about two miles square in the center of this city.

Hypothesized: X follows me continually, whenever I go out, for one of several reasons that are mutually exclusive. He is on a mission of reclamation, a private detective hired by my father; he is a police agent; he is an acquaintance in disguise or an acquaintance of someone I know/have known, who wants revenge for a real/unreal offense I have committed.

> PLOT:
> There was once a young man of twenty-four, Nicholas Angoff, who woke one morning to discover that he was alone. Utter silence. A vacuum. His eyesight became sharper and he saw that he was in a room—a room with walls, peeling wallpaper, and a gash in the ceiling out of which wires hung. No light fixtures. The young man stood cautiously in the center of the room, measuring the distance between himself and the walls. There was also a window, and a door. His arms moved to protect him—shielding the soft parts of his body. He did not have enough arms. There was a kind of fur over his face, especially over his eyeballs. A film, a fuzz. He stood in the center of the chilly room and began to think of the logical sequence of events that had brought him to this place in his life...

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, before this I will have to get in certain information: a description of the young man, which will be approximately my own description except I'll give him black hair, long ratty black hair, instead of long ratty frizzy brown hair; black is more dramatic. When I've thought about it, I've thought that I would prefer black hair, over the years. And perhaps I'll add an inch or so to his height, make him six foot two. Good. And what else? He is intelligent, like me, but sluggish and easily confused, like me, and not really very intelligent when you come down to it, like me, but ordinarily bright; accused sometimes of being a smart-aleck, but those days are past... We're all too far gone now. I will have to work all this information in: how he/I popped too many brain cells, sensing immortality in the vigor of young manhood, etc. We both sleep ten/twelve/fifteen hours at a stretch, unless we are awake for three days straight.

> He went to the window and looked out. The pressure had already begun at the base of his head, even before he saw the figure in the street below....

Or is this too abrupt? I want only to write about him, that bastard who is starving me to death, whom I have never really seen face to face; but maybe I should hold Nicholas back from the window for a while?

> He thought: *I will telephone my father....*

But no, he wouldn't think of that. Not any more than I would. I will have to think of another way of getting the father in, getting him mentioned—his occupation, his money, his handsome graying urbane face, his distress, the "emotional divorce" from his wife/my mother, and all that.

> He went to the window and stared down at the street below. Empty. Sidewalk, storefronts, a thin rib of litter blown up against the building across the way. The street was empty yet it had that bare, frigid look of a stage about to be entered...

What, is that right? "A stage about to be entered..." Do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people *enter* stages? They walk on stages, they come in out of the wings and appear on stage, but they don't *enter* stages, what crap this all is! Erase everything.

Given: X, who is following N.

Given: the city, this building, this room, the toilet down the hall, the leaking faucet, the rubble down in the foyer, the stench, the other people, their voices and thumping feet.

Given: the girl, Rebecca, the long lean legs in white slacks, soiled slacks; a sweater pulled down brutally over her thin hips—that awful fluorescent green, a sweater made of something called "orlon"—her hair straw-colored and long, listless. Has a habit of chewing on the ends of her hair. Her face is querulous, too sharp. But she is a striking woman and carries herself, particularly her head, with that knowledge, that special knowledge women have—it would have carried into her old age, if she'd had an old age. Her eyes are large and shiny, brown eyes. Overlarge. Someone should have taken her moist hands in his, some kindly family doctor, and said: "Rebecca, you have beautiful big brown eyes. Have you ever had a basal metabolism test?" ...So restless, Rebecca. She can't sit still for five minutes, she is always crossing and uncrossing her legs, twitching her toes, scratching between her toes with her jagged fingernails, throwing her head back so that her hair flips (a high-school girl's trick?) and stings my face, and sighing loudly, angrily. "Why are you so restless, Rebecca?" I might say in exasperation. When the room got too much for us we went out, anywhere. Any weather. We didn't always notice the weather, to tell the truth. She always had a cold. If I had loved her, I would have taken her wet, cold feet between my hands and warmed them, just as a grandfatherly doctor (the kind now nearly extinct) should have taken her cold hands in his and warmed them, but nobody thought to do this for Rebecca, she was too impatient and too beautiful.

Given: The natural and normal biological attraction between Rebecca and myself, somewhat dulled, hazed over by the circumstances of our lives. Or rather: my attraction to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rebecca. I wonder if she could have loved any man, anyone at all. It had nothing to do with her body, which was a normal woman's body, or with her background (she had been married, had an ordinary squalid life; her parents were ordinary and resisted my penchant for mythologizing, as soon as I saw a snapshot of them), but with a peculiar boredom in her glands. Women have that boredom today. Never did I come across this phenomenon in the past, in history, browsing through old novels/biographies/journals in my former life as a student; it is something that has happened only this year. In the past, women wore twenty yards of cloth wrapped carefully around them, on the plump surfaces of their bodies, and carried themselves as if carrying an armful of eggs, but you could be certain of passion once all the cloth was unwound. Not now. Women like Rebecca (she was really a woman, not a girl—twenty-eight years old) come running across the street to you, a stranger, and gladly do they nuzzle their lips against your throat, eagerly do they wrap themselves around you, arms and legs, but then a hideous convulsive yawn begins deep in their throats....

Given: the deteriorating nature of human relationships in America today. I don't pretend to understand it, though I am contributing to it. Just as I eluded my family, who love/loved me, so did Rebecca elude me, constantly. I wanted to kill her, it was awful.... But perhaps if she had ever kissed me full on the mouth, if she had stared at me with those large brown eyes, listening to me, perhaps I would have kicked her out. I can't say. I am a pendulum that swings between intense excitement (nervousness on the edge of terror: I don't even have to see that man, X, any longer before I break out into sweat, it's enough just to remember him) and an intense boredom, a desolation I can taste...yes, I can taste it, right now I can taste it... it is like sand, hard baked sand, sand that has been around for five thousand years, walked upon by barefoot people and dogs. Sometimes I get all the way downstairs to the foyer and then it comes upon me, the terror, the knowledge that X is waiting for me in the street, and so I run back up here, to this laughable sanctuary, walls that are probably col-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lapsible or penetrable by his special spying devices anyway, and my heart is literally hammering with terror... my eyes jump into every corner and up to that wound in the ceiling, that gouged-out eye with the optical nerves hanging down, and I am paralyzed with....

> Nicholas was sometimes paralyzed with himself. The thought of himself. The terror of himself. He carried his head around with him, so how could he get out of it? No way! Stuck. Stuck. Stuck.

...And at other times I drag myself up the stairs, I use that verb truly, intentionally, "drag," I must drag my body up, I can feel the roots of my hair pulling wearily at my head, and my head pulling my neck, and the elastic cords in my neck tugging at my shoulders, my torso, *oh, come on! only a few more steps*! It is so boring, this stairway. This body. Heavy as a corpse, this body. I am tempted to give up. Surrender to gravity. Lie down on the dirty stairs, with head on one step, torso on another, stomach on another, legs and feet abandoned somewhere in the shadows below. Let the kids jump over me. Or, maybe, I should lie upside-down: my head enriched by a rush of blood.

> Nicholas lay upside-down on the stairs, one day. Blood rushed into his head to rejuvenate the brain. Lying there, he imagined peacefully the wet gray-pink folds of his brain and could not believe that they were eroding, like ordinary ridges and hills made of earth. Similarly, he could not believe that his heart, which was always saying Hey You, would come to a halt someday.

What a joke, if X came in here one day, barged right into this building, and found me like that! He is probably a very conventional man, a citizen. He must be, since he is so faithful, out there at his post.... If he saw me lying upside-down it might frighten him so much that he would leave me alone. He might quit the assignment. Or, if he is out to get revenge on me, he might take pity on me and leave me alone. *That guy is crazy*. He might think that my trouble is contagious,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that just gazing into my watery eyes would contaminate him ....

When I look out my window here, I see the building opposite this building, and that boarded-up store that was once a grocery store, with aged tattered posters on it, I see the doorways opposite me and the windows opposite me, where people presumably live. Off to one side, at the periphery of my vision, I can see X. He is perfectly faithful. He is always there. Sometimes a rush of joy sweeps through me and I want to yell out the window to X and to traffic and pedestrians and people sleeping across the way that I am here, I am living, I love them, *I love them*, we are all human beings living together through this moment of history and we must, we must love one another—

> One day Nicholas approached three men on the street. They seemed to be turning from him. Their shoulders moved—three shoulders, three shoulders turning away. Heads turning. Away. He said: "I need some help." They said: "Move." He said: "What did you say...?" because the pressure on the back of his head made him a little deaf. They said: "Move on." The young man, Nicholas, began to cry. He thought wildly: Is someone crying? Who is crying? Why won't they talk to me when I love them and we are all here together, on this earth together, why won't they help me when I am in trouble, I am going crazy, I need money, I need a shot, why are they walking away, what is that noise—somebody crying? He said: "I know who you bastards are—I know your names and everything about you!" They were walking away. The sidewalk would fill up with other people. "You're afraid of me—I know your names and I could turn you in," he said. Maybe he did not say these words out loud. He was crying. His face smashed like a girl's, eyes crinkled and hot. Posters on a store window two feet in front of him: VOTE FOR FRANCIS T. JONES. He stood there for a while crying and a squad car passed by, slowly, taking no notice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> of him, and what must have been an old man came by and paused, eying him, breathing hoarsely, but decided for some reason to walk on. When Nicholas came to he saw, in the doorway of a drugstore up the block, in the center of a loose, noisy crowd of Negroes, *that man* calmly watching him.

Oh yes: *that man* is always watching me, in or out of a crowd of Negroes. He has binoculars, a telescope, a mechanism to see through walls, a tape recorder, an instrument that measures my footsteps, my heartbeat, my thoughts. He is driving me crazy. He is Rebecca's ex-husband out to get me, or her ex-father, who was supposed to be a nut, so she hinted—or he is in the hire of my own father, who also hates me, or he belongs to the FBI and is waiting for me to lead him to someone important. ...But what does he look like? My vision is off a little. That is the horror I live with now: I can never quite see the man's face. If I could see it I might understand something. I might see a human face there, human features—the two of us might turn out to be friends, we might shake hands, introduce ourselves, say hello, filled with a sudden spurt of generosity—

> He loved her, he imagined her forever trapped in his arms, he lay with her for long damp sticky hours, he pressed his face everywhere against her flesh, yearning to suck out her soul. Her stubborn female soul. Where was it? Where could he suck at it? On her lovely arms there were many tiny pricks and red spots and sores and scabs. Nicholas closed his eyes against the body of his beloved Rebecca: rubbing his eyes, his eyelashes, against her. In honor of her body, her face, her beauty, her soul. It was not enough to say, "I love you," because other men had said that to her. Other men had said everything to her, using up all the words. She lay her hand on Nicholas' head as if in pity. She stretched back, her mouth open and yearning backward into a patch of cold clear winter sunlight from the window.... "Why do you want to leave me? Why do you want to get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> money on your own? I can give you money, I can take care of you," Nicholas begged. Her body was warm and slippery and though he was lying with her she seemed to be eluding him. *Better to kill her.* But no: he loved her. That was why he pressed his tender eyes against her, rubbing the eyeballs against her flesh, offering his eyelashes to her—how much more gentle could a lover be, what is more gentle in a man than his eyelashes? She was sobbing. "Why do you want to leave? Is it the city? We could leave together," he said. She sobbed, she pushed his head away, she began to move her body on the bed, slowly, as if in a dance without music, and he stared at her until, after a while, she lay still and fell asleep.

That really happened, but I fell asleep too. Passion wore me out. We slept together, for many weeks, but in different parts of the globe. "Rebecca" and I. She dozed along the Pacific shore, the long length of her bobbing in warm waves, curved to the shoreline, her hair drifting, dreaming, her toes and fingers nibbled by tiny amorous fish. But I, being the male, was thrown in my stupor against the rocks along the Atlantic coast, my body bruised, a cracked rib here, a cracked rib there, a lacerated scalp, a head concussion, eyes pecked out by hungry seagulls—We slept but the two waters of our sleep did not flow together.

> He said to his father: "No, I won't talk to her. Why? She walks past my door so that I can hear her crying. Let her cry. I am not going to cry. I am not sick either. I am not going back to the clinic. If you call the doctor I will throw myself out the front window. I will run naked across the golf course. No. Don't touch me. Nobody is going to touch me. You don't love me and you don't love each other and I always had to see that picture of you, on the inside of my eyelids, when I was in bed and you two were in bed, I had to see that picture of you, imagining you, making love and falling asleep, making love with your eyes closed, in the dark, falling asleep

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> before you were finished, because you didn't love each other or me or anyone, and if you fell asleep and slept all night in the same bed you were not really in the same bed because you were not really together..."

Did I really say that to my father? Some of it. A few words. When I said that about the golf course, he started coming toward me, and when I said, "Don't touch me," he slapped me across the face. I think that happened in December. The big tree was up in the front hall. I went out of my mind with the frosting on that tree, the glitter and the angels' hair and the smell of evergreen needles, everything was so lovely, why did he have to slap me? He and Sol Mintz own "The Silk Touch," cosmetics for black women, you see the billboards and the ads all over, beautiful leggy black women wearing "Silk Touch" make-up on their flawless faces or their flawless bodies, every square inch of flesh as far as I know, and Melvin T. Riddle, a handsome black man, a member of the "Black Capitalists Coalition," is president of the company and often interviewed, his picture even in *Newsweek*, very grateful to my father and Sol. My father also owns Caesar Aluminum. He had to fly back from Munich fast to get me out of jail. The two of us wept together for five hours. Off and on he kept asking me, "Did they molest you in there?" and didn't believe me when I said I couldn't exactly remember. Oh, I don't take my body so seriously, Father, it isn't that important or that private, why not do a good deed for some bastard worse off than I am...? But I told him I didn't think so. No. I didn't think anyone had "molested" me. What I said wasn't enough, he got disgusted. He stopped crying and started getting disgusted. The next morning he was more disgusted. He wouldn't let my mother in to see me. He kicked me out. In December, I think...then he came down to get me, where I was staying with a friend, but it lasted only a few days and then I left home again without saying good-bye. The end. It must have been embarrassing for him to have a thirty-year-old freak of a son, always crying.

Yes, I really am thirty years old. A thirty-year-old son.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is something outlandish about that term, it is not as agreeable as a twenty-four-year-old son or, better yet, a nineteen-year-old son. Once I was these sons. I was once a fifteen-year-old son also, but that was so long ago it isn't worth remembering. One time I threw out all the snapshots of me. The hell with them. I burned Father's miles of film, the gawky grins and smirks. Hell. The hell with them. Now I am thirty years old, unlike my hero Nicholas, soon to be thirty-one, and I spend all of my life waiting for that man to come up here and knock on my door and claim me. All the rest is fiction: I am making up a plot to keep him away.

> Nicholas loved Dorothy but she kept falling asleep in his arms. She kept yearning backward, backward. He hated her, lying above her, "above" her body even though he was touching her along every inch of her flesh, because he could not make her stay awake. So he thought, suddenly, "I will make up a story to keep her awake."

Well, yes, her name is Dorothy; it was Dorothy. Not Rebecca. Blond hair, yes, but not very clean. It looked bitten off at its ends. A film to her fair skin that would roll a little beneath my curious thumb. It would roll out black: thin black rolls of dirt, like the black spines of shrimp when they haven't been carefully "deveined."

> Dorothy touched her lovely flesh with the needle's point. *Music, a cascade of notes*! But no music. Pursing her lips, perspiring, she searched for a vein...but no vein. A bead of sweat darted down her nose, unnoticed. She maneuvered the plunger again, shyly, but—no blood! Not even a drop! She squinted to see if maybe there was a drop loosed, just a drop...? No, try again. Try again. Don't tremble. Nicholas stood above her, encouraging her. *Don't tremble like that, Dorothy*, he whispered. The back of his head was bloated and silly and he couldn't hear her reply. Only music, a cascade of notes, and his beloved dipping the needle in, timidly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not yet impatiently, "deveining" herself with infinite patience....

This morning I woke to discover I was alone. What, alone? Where had they all gone? I saw that the room had walls, four walls, the wallpaper was peeling, exactly like the inside of my skull, why did this surprise me? A rumpled bed. That smell. That smell, friends, is *me*. In the ceiling there is a hole, a gash. No light fixtures, just torn wires. A gouged-out eye. There was something over my skin, prominent against the moist parts of my face, where my thoughts move especially fast—my mouth and eyes—it was like a second skin. Fur. Transparent fur. Is it before birth, am I still in a silken cocoon, in a female womb, a stranger's womb, waiting to be born? ...I stood in the center of the room, my knees shaking slightly, trying to think of the logical sequence of events that had brought me to this place in my life.

The examined life is not worth living.

Every time I wake up I jump out of bed, terrified, and I spend some long minutes in the center of this room, thoughts whirl in my brain or what is left of my brain, the pressure builds up, I carefully prepare a shot for myself and take it, loving myself tenderly, being very good to myself, and the terror fades, the way people's faces fade if you don't see them daily. Joy propels me to the window and I want to shout down at everyone about life, love, happiness, I want to exhibit myself so that the sick and unhappy can take heart from me, a thirty-year-old creature of skin and bones and constant diarrhea who is nevertheless very happy. On flame with happiness! At such times I am not even certain who I am. Whose body this is. Am I myself, a boy of fifteen or a young man of nineteen or twenty-four or thirty, or already aged into a man of thirty-one, or am I someone else (an ex-friend of mine, a Negro named Dill; or Dorothy herself, an ex-lover, now dead; or someone in the building across the street, behind those mysterious mourning windows), because my soul has exploded outward to take in all of the universe. Nothing is excluded. I know this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact: that something miraculous exists where I stand, some being, pinpricked and marveling, his skull open so that the very stars themselves (invisible during the ugly daytime) make little love-pinches in his brain.

> But then it faded. Stopped. Nicholas sat down heavily, slack-mouthed. Was it over so soon? Over? What was over? He couldn't remember. Was it Nicholas himself that was coming to an end? *Oh, my brain,* he thought in surprise, *it is being squeezed out of shape! Somebody's hand, the fleshy palm of his hand, is pressing against the base of my skull and making it numb.* He did not know if he was going crazy, or if "craziness" was coming his way and would sweep him up in it.

This is the record of someone going crazy, in case you are curious. I wish you could feel the itching that runs up and down my body, like those fancy bubble lights on Christmas trees, lights bubbling and blinking on and off. Nails, fingernails also itch. Itches. Scratching. Blood. I think it was a few days after Dorothy died that I ran out onto the street—bumped into a woman—kept on running. I went to a gas station near Cass to get a container of gasoline. The gas station is across the street from TransLove, Inc., stucco and streaked white paint, now boarded up. Kids with books brush by me, not seeing me, going to the university a few blocks away. A heavy container of gasoline. I like the smell of gasoline. I always have. In a White Tower diner I can see a row of people at the counter, sitting—it must be late afternoon and not morning, as I had thought for a while—I've been sleeping for a long while—and one of the men is *that man,* X himself. He sits with his overcoat on, his back to me. Sipping coffee. Eyes in the back of his head, watching me perpetually. He is driving me crazy. Should I rush inside the diner and scream at him, should I try to kill him, should I wait outside and introduce myself and shake hands, should I run back to my room and slam the door behind me, sobbing...?

Rebecca said in a voice like music: "I want to die." She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> put her hand on his bare back. She said gently: "I want to die." Her lips moved back from her gums, the gums of a young woman who has been strung-out for two weeks, gray gums, gums streaked with a yellowish substance, and she whispered: "I want to die." Nicholas wanted to tell her that his love was enough to keep her living. He wanted to declaim certain truths that have existed throughout history. The truth of love: of why life is worth living, through love, of how the chemistry of love makes for better living, makes living liveable. He wanted to recite a poem to her in which these statements were articulated. But his mind blanked out at the touch of her hand. Her words moved soundlessly inside his head. Words, syllables, sounds. A breath. He wanted to carve out on the back of her hand, into those cheap flimsy useless veins we all have there: I LOVE YOU. But the idea faded.

Anyway we were not alone, my friend Streeter was there with us. In fact he was watching us. He had just finished reading out loud something from the *Detroit News*—probably the Jane Lee Advice column—and now he was just watching us, a smile below the faint little smile of his moustache. He had to shave once in a while because he had a job. What effect would it have, I wonder, to inform readers that a love scene is not private, that a third party is present? I think it would destroy everything. I think it would offend people. I know it would offend me, if I were the reader...and it offends me now, to remember Streeter, that son of a bitch. He still owes me money. It might be Streeter who is following me, in disguise, or maybe he has convinced the police that I am important and that I should be followed, knowing it would drive me crazy? Because Streeter loved Dorothy too. He once said to her: "I hate your name. Why aren't you Rebecca? I will call you Rebecca." Streeter was always changing people's names and calling them whatever he wanted. He called me "Buddy" and "Brick," I don't know why. He was always turning up when you thought he had left for good. He liked to impersonate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people who wore uniforms on the job: policemen, delivery men, soldiers, sailors, even chauffeurs. He bought a chauffeur's outfit and lived in it for a long time—two weeks straight—carrying himself with dignity everywhere, very vain. He tried to get a job as a real chauffeur, but didn't know how to advertise himself. He never did get a job as a chauffeur. So Streeter was in the room with us that day—

> She said: "Will you let me go. Because I want to die." He said: "Why do you want to die?" Her large, shiny, confused eyes. Her chemistry brewed to a storm, uncontainable. A raging thyroid. Raging liver. Heart. Lungs. She was burning out, burning away. She said: "If you love me, you'll let go of me." He said: "I can't let you go..." He said: "You don't love me or you would want to live." He said :"All right, God damn it, I will let you go..."
> And so she died.

"And so she died."

> Dill ran in and started reading them a news story, in a terrible voice. Mrs. Mungo, the mother of Herb Mungo, a police informer and a traitor, a betrayer, a thief, an evil young man, Mrs. Mungo had been interviewed by a reporter. Dill had made the bomb himself with materials Nicholas had bought and the bomb had been sent to Herb Mungo's apartment, left outside in the hall, and a few days later Mrs. Mungo came to see where her son was (out of town on business, maybe) and saw the package addressed to him. So she took it home with her. Mr. Mungo, a Greyhound bus driver, was not home at the time; but the five Mungo kids, Herb's younger brothers and sisters, were all there. What fun! A present! So they opened the package, on the kitchen table, and... and the bomb did not go off... Mrs. Mungo said to the police: "I took a look at that thing and told Bobby to throw it out in the backyard, fast! I knew what it was right away from all the stuff on television. Now, can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you imagine anybody sending a thing like that through the mail? People should know what might happen with a thing like that, and five children in a family. I don't know what the world is coming to..."

Dill was very angry. He read the story over several times, shouting. Dill had wanted to be an actor, in his former life. Perhaps he had actually been an actor.

But none of this is a logical sequence of events. It does not add up to anything logical. If a human life, my own life, is to make sense it must add up to a certain unit, reductive to a certain statement: *He was a hero. He was a hero because he resisted suicide. He was a coward. He was a coward because he resisted suicide. He was somebody's thirty-year-old aging archaic son.* My brain is going, but before it goes completely I want to make very clear my dislike for you: my readers, who are reading through my life as fast as possible, skimming along, impatient with me and hoping for some final mess. You read, people like you, only to whistle through your teeth and think: *Jesus, there's somebody worse off than I am!* Why else read, why plow your way through somebody else's plots? A "plot" is not fiction, as you know, but very real; it is the record of someone's brain, a trail like a snail's trail, sticky and shameful. ...But in creating a plot to explain my life, I am being forced to change things around. The essential story gets away from me. The main thing is that I am being followed and tortured to madness by someone, probably a stranger, probably a hired stranger, and I have to keep repeating this for fear I will forget it as my mind goes. Otherwise I will keep asking myself about certain events—people—memories—that are confusing. Did I love Rebecca/Dorothy, or is that a lie? I loved her when my chemistry ordered *Love*! but the rest of the time I think I forgot her. She certainly forgot me. We lay dreamily together in our two halves of the globe, but when I told her I loved her she fell asleep; when she told me, one day, of her ex-husband and what he had done to her, I shut my mind off and watched her lips move but I heard nothing. And I never really knew...I never really knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whether Dorothy and Streeter and Dill and some of the others liked me for myself or because I had money, an allowance my father finally gave me, because I was the only one down here who had money and who was generous...

> After Rebecca's death, Nicholas himself declined... After Rebecca's death, Nicholas himself thought increasingly of death, of an end, a conclusion, of the stairway outside his room where one might lie upside-down forever....
> After Rebecca's death he began to think of the marriage they might have made, the children they might have made, now that it was certain she could not return to him....
> After Dorothy's death, in fact the next day, X appeared at the top of a stairway and looked down at Nicholas, claiming him....

Dorothy did die. I keep thinking of her death, again and again. Her death. "Her" death. She never said most of those things—"I want to die," etc. She never spoke gently, delicately, musically to me at all. I don't think she noticed me except to ask for money. Only a dry brushing of her lips against mine—she would never kiss me the right way, though I begged her—and the way she died was not suicide, it was not deliberate at all, but like this: the three of us had shared everything, Dorothy and Streeter and I, and we shared our best times as well as our worst times, and one night when we were all high together we seized one another's hands, everything raging in me, a delirious storm, everything joyful, and I could feel their friendly hearts racing like mine, our pulses racing, our eyeballs burning, and then...and then I had to sneeze suddenly....

> A sneeze! Rebecca leaped back from them, terrified. Her body quaked. She could not take it—the noise was too much, too much of a surprise—her body raced in terror—too much stress, too much heartbeat. It exploded in her—the heart. Blood gushed out of mouth, nose,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ears, eyes. Oh, exclamations of blood! Nicholas stared at her in disbelief. Blood poured out of her. Streeter began to run and Nicholas followed, out of the room and down the stairs and into the street. They were in the street before the corpse stopped its convulsions!

It was no dramatic moment. There is no drama when lovers part like that—no preparation, nothing. How do you prepare for your beloved's sudden death? The explosion of her heart? A muscular little fist that stretched out all its fingers suddenly in terror, in despair... (This morning my own heart pounded in cold, brutal, militant palpitations for an hour and a half, frightened by a cat prowling around in the alley. God damn these stray cats!) If only I hadn't sneezed... What do you do when your love dies so quickly, so strangely? You must write about it. Rewrite it. You can change both your names, exaggerate your love for her, exaggerate her beauty, try to figure out how this leads to your being followed now by her ex-husband, the boy from Midland, Michigan, who was so unkind to her.

> There was once a young man of twenty-four who, having been praised years ago by an instructor at Cornell, and given a B+ in freshman English, decided he would write a story about himself. He decided that it would begin in the past—some personal history, but not too much, because obvious autobiographical information tires readers—and move quickly to the near-present, the break with his family, the three months camping out in the city of Detroit, the friendships with certain people, the unhappy love affair with a girl he would call Rebecca, the suicide of Rebecca (how? slashed wrists? gas? an overdose of pills would be too close to the truth), some description of the city, the jumbled skyline, the traffic several blocks over on the John Lodge Expressway, etc., the Narcotics Squad, the Vice Squad, dirt and flu and a constant leaking faucet, etc., some sentimental remarks about the human condition, being a son/having a father, etc. What made him pause

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> was the knowledge that if he wrote something terrible he might have to fulfill it; might have to make it come true. But what other possibility of salvation would there be for him, except this writing of the scenario of his own life, his predicament with the deadly X, who is always waiting? No other way. No. So he would write a story that would make sense of X. By creating a coherent plot he would then explain to his own satisfaction why someone was obsessed with him. Or he would hint (and convince himself) that the man, X, was only imagined—a harmless dot in front of the eyes, bouncing and wiggling like crazy, only bothersome if it is taken seriously—and so he would exorcise the man, the phantom, the perpetual X on the edge of his consciousness. ...But, having written eighteen pages he discovered that X could not be explained away so easily. There was the X on paper, and the X out in the street. Two X's. X out in the street is never in the narrative, really, but only mentioned—always out of eyesight, out of the range of human affection and pleas! The police, or a police agent, followed an acquaintance of Nicholas' once and indicated, somehow, that there was a relationship between them that resulted in the acquaintance being found dead one day.... The police know how to put certain pressure on one's associates to kill: after all, nobody wants to be betrayed. But Nicholas is no threat to anyone and cannot betray anyone, now. Therefore it makes no sense for anyone to follow him; therefore X is not really following him....

If I go out to get something to eat he will see me. I can't go out. I could buy some more food from kids in the building, cookies and crackers and other junk, which they steal from their mothers' cupboards, but the kids haven't been around today; I could break into their mothers' cupboards and eliminate the kids entirely, but if I break into someone's apartment I am likely to be shot. How long can I stay holed up here? I can put my hands around myself, around my waist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A skeleton. A thirty-year-old skeleton. My long skinny thumbs touching, straining to touch like lovers, and the third finger of each hand touching firmly. It would be interesting to know how much I weigh....

I will escape this self-pity by returning to my plot.

The end of the story: a logical sequence of events that results in the young hero cleaning up his life, walking out into the street, confronting X—who turns out to be, I suspect, a private detective hired by his father—and the two of them eye each other for a few suspenseful minutes, the young man shaky from going without food, and from taking too prodigious a variety of drugs, but still essentially healthy and intelligent and rational, an obviously civilized young man whom society would be eager to rehabilitate. And the dialogue will go something like this: "Your father is very worried about you, Nicholas. Don't you realize that?" Nicholas, his face serious and handsomely pale: "I'm beginning to realize what I've done to him." "Shall we go now?" the man will say. "Yes, I'm ready now," Nicholas will say. He and X walk together down the block, side by side, walking together down the block, together, the two of them, walking down the block together, together....

> Tears spilled out of his eyes at the look of himself: his hands, his two hands, could span his entire body. Trembling. Weeping. He understood that his mind was about to go and that he must not wind up in Lafayette Clinic like the rest of them, gibbering and drooling all over himself, he had enough dignity left, so he moved one leg and then the other, left and right and left again and right, lifting his knees with his two hands, until he came to the Mobile station near Cass and bought a can of gasoline. Was he being followed? He didn't look around. On Woodward he hitched a ride north with someone who took pity on him—a motorist whose car ran out of gas? no matter that he looks like hell and his hair is frizzed out around his head in an explosion of kinky brown curls and he weighs about one hundred and ten pounds,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still the can of gasoline suggests that he is an automobile owner and therefore a good citizen—and drove him all the way up to Six Mile. Good. Coming home. He crossed over to Hamilton Road and went along the deserted sidewalk of the private street to his parents' home, past the Detroit Golf Club, too large, complex, and magnificent a home to describe, and walked up the broad front flagstone walk, in the gauzy pleasant lilac-scented air of a May evening, and around to the garage, where a single car was parked, and in the garage, sitting suddenly, coming to rest, sitting Indian-fashion with his ankles locked whitely about each other, he dumped the gasoline over himself and, before anyone could catch up to him, X or anyone at all, before anyone even knew he had come back, he set himself on fire. So many times had Nicholas returned to this home, this house, wandering homeward in his head!—like a ghost wandering, yearning back, backward, but never until this moment did he know why he would return. Yes, constantly was he going home, always going home in the confused plot of his life, and never until the last hour of his life did he understand what home meant—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Happy Islanders

James Blake

The following letters are from James Blake's The Joint. *When the first selection of his letters from prison were published in the mid-fifties, the addressee of many of the letters was referred to simply as "X"... "Dear X." This device was used to shield the identity of the recipient, who, according to prison regulations, was required to be an immediate member of the prisoner's family. Blake was in prison on a second hitch when the letters were published. In fact, "X" was Nelson Algren, the distinguished author of* The Man With the Golden Arm, *who in 1948 met Blake by chance in a Chicago nightclub named The Pink Poodle. Blake was playing the piano in the band. "He came in to look at the girls, I guess," Blake recalls, and the two became acquainted. After Blake was locked up in Raiford, convicted on breaking, entering, and larceny charges in Jacksonville, Florida, he wrote Algren a somewhat tentative letter, telling him what had happened, and when it was replied to, the correspondence began. Algren's letters to him were "funny," as Blake remembers, and, more important, continually urged him to keep on writing. Though comparatively well-read, Blake had had little experience with the written word until the restrictions of prison life left him with no other way to express himself. The stimulation of corresponding with a well-known author was important: it sharpened his efforts, not only in his letters to Algren but also to his other correspondents, largely musician friends.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Publication of the letters came about mainly through the enthusiasm of Simone de Beauvoir, who saw a packet of them while visiting Algren in Chicago. She sent the letters to Jean-Paul Sartre, who had them translated and published in Les Temps Modernes. *Shortly thereafter, some of the original letters appeared in* The Paris Review. *The letters in "The Happy Islanders" were written following Blake's release from prison after a second term.*

G.A.P.

Charleston, South Carolina
JUNE 30, 1956

Dear Nelson:

Well, I left the Academy after a simple but moving graduation ceremony, with a big sawbuck courtesy the State of Florida, and literally hit the road. Impossible to describe the mixed emotions I had walking away from the penitentiary. For a considerable stretch, I could still see the Rock, where I had spent two and a half years. Could still see the big recreation field and the path around the edge of it where I had walked so many miles in confusion and anxiety. I could even recognize some of the convicts on the field. And I did not, for a fact, know whether I had been cast out of Heaven or Hell. I had left behind the young Sandy, in a grinding scene of farewell that left a knot in my gut.

But when I crossed the bridge over the river and the road took a sharp turn, I was in the world I had not been able to see from behind the fences. I took a deep breath and said to myself, ready or not, motherfuckers, here I come, and felt exhilaration on top of the apprehension.

The nearest town to the prison, Starke, is about five miles, and I guess I walked about half of it. Just dawdling along, looking at the fields, looking at the cows (feeling myself watched as I passed the few houses along the road). A pickup truck came along and gave me a lift into Starke. One of the guards at the prison, a decent sort, but there was some grisly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conversation that gave me the feeling of being half In, half Out. From Starke, a bus to Jacksonville. I didn't pause there, it's a miserable town at best and on Sunday it's chilling, and I wanted to get on with it, so I took a city bus to the northern city limits.

I planned to go to Atlanta, and I expected to wait a long time for a ride, Sunday being a bad day. To my surprise, I waited only a little while at the side of the highway, when a bigass Chrysler stopped. I ran towards it and discovered, with a shaft of dismay, that the driver was a spade, very black and very rough looking. Not for nothing all that training in the Rock. I jumped in, with a "Thanks a lot, man."

I told him I was going to Atlanta, he said he was bound for Charleston, but would give me a lift as far as he could. It took me a couple of minutes to surmise this cat was getting blocked. When he told me to open the glove compartment and there was a big jug of Canadian Club, and beer in a cooler on the floor in back, I knew he was getting blocked in a very methodical fashion.

I had a couple of drinks and a beer, and started to get carefree, I hadn't had any real juice in over two years—man, I was *clean*. By the time we got to the turnoff for Atlanta, I had decided to go to Charleston with my buddy.What the hell, I had never *seen* Charleston.

After a bit, though, the paranoid caution I'd acquired in the Rock began to take over, and I started to worry about his driving, which was becoming fairly free-form. A pusher friend of mine in the joint had given me some bennies as a bon voyage gift (talk about pagan decency) and I started to ply him with an antidote to all that juice. It seemed only to intensify his anarchical mood.

He was called Stony, he told me, he had been to Jacksonville trying to get his wife to come back to him. He ran a shrimp boat out of Mount Pleasant, across the harbor from Charleston, and was on his way to acquiring another boat. Devoting himself to rising above his station had cost him his wife, and he was a bitter somber black man.

By this time, we were well into Georgia, and started hitting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the small Deep-South towns; somnolent at their brightest, on Sunday they were graveyards with traffic lights. We stopped in one for gas, Darien, I think it was, at a combination gas station and general store. The usual loafers and stooges were hanging around. Stony's manner as he ordered gas was peremptory (the air of a "smart nigger") and the air was full of knives.

We got away from that, though expecting them to call ahead and have the state troopers on our ass. It was odd, too, how the vibrations between Stony and me changed for quite a while after we pulled away from that pool of ugliness.

Somewhere along the road in the afternoon, we saw a truck, decorated with bunting, parked on the shoulder of the road. Stony slowed down, saw it was some kind of black picnic (it was a church outing) and he stopped. Instantly all kinds of black gals, high on beer, were sticking their heads in the window. ("Lookit that beautiful breed. Come outa there, boy!") I found myself surrounded by shrieking satirical black women, found myself dancing with one on a stretch of concrete from some abandoned building, while a radio brayed rhythm-and-blues.

When we finally got away from that, after an eternity of strain and embarrassment for me, Stony said drily, "You don't dig broads, do you?"

"I don't mind broads. I just don't like loud broads."

"Uh huh."

When we got to Charleston it was night, and raining like hell. Stony knew that I was just out of the joint, had no bread, and no place to go. Without a word he drove through Charleston onto the long high humpbacked bridge that crosses the Cooper and Ashley rivers to Mount Pleasant. It was pitch dark, and I could smell the fish and salt smell of the ocean. I followed him out on to a wharf, and we were on board his boat. I spent the night there with him. By the light of the oil lamp in that small fishy cabin, I felt a tenuous security—and a strong sense of brotherly love such as I had not known before.

In the morning we faced the facts—it was impossible for me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to stay there. He drove me back to Charleston, and I spent the day missing the strength of Stony, and casing the town. There was no doubt in my mind I had to move fast and I looked for a joint to break into.

That night, prowling, I was picked up on suspicion (I didn't know that Charleston had two fuzz for every citizen) and taken to the station. They shook me down and found my discharge from the Florida joint. The sergeant was indignant.

"Just got out and trying to get back in, huh? Well, you ain't gonna do it, not here." He calls up a mission on Skid Row and tells somebody I'm coming over. They even gave me a ride.

And that's where I am now. An Irishman, the Reverend Ryan runs it, and he seems, I would say, intrigued by my case. Besides, I worked like a dog cleaning up the dormitory they got here, and I play piano for the phony services he holds every night for the winos and drifters. (It's a highly polished grand piano, in good shape, and when all the saints are away, I get to play it.)

I have moments of speculation, about my friends. Permitting me to be run though the grinder, once again. (Out of curiosity, to see what I'd look like, reconstituted?) I think you could say I'm a little different.

That bridge, incidentally, between confinement and freedom—it's a suspension bridge, and it hangs by a thread. Very difficult from the one that leads the other way. That is a triumph of engineering, solid as a rock. I seem to be on the other side of the bridge now, but I'll be goddammed if I know where I am.

Charleston, South Carolina
JULY 26, 1956

Dear Nelson:

Remember the song that "nothin' could be finah than to be in Carolinah"? Lies, all lies, the guy that wrote it lived in Far Rockaway. In fleeing from the Reverend Ryan and his counterfeit Christians, I've become entangled in a new set of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carolina complications. I got so depressed and fed up with the Rev and his Holy Bobble that I swung with the collection one night (a cool 83 cents) and went out looking for trouble.

I figure I gave the Rev more than 83 cents worth of happiness. Twofold happiness, in fact. When he first saw me, he thought he'd found the 13th Disciple. Later, when the true nature of the beast became apparent, he was able to say he had personally encountered the Anti-Christ. So it was kicks coming and going.

Anyway, I went looking for mischief, and found Dan Cooper. He owns a night club called the Magnolia Room, which is the haunt of the racier element in Charleston aristocracy. And when it comes to genealogy-conscious stuffed owls, Charleston can show the Beacon Hill interlopers a thing or two; everybody I meet descends from a Huguenot.

Dan is one of the Charleston pioneers; the Coopers were on hand to greet the Huguenots and sell them the acres of malarial marshland they settled on. Only Dan is a renegade; instead of living in genteel decline, and hocking the family ormolu, he gets rich running a saloon.

He's a combination of Old South punctilio and dockhand aggressiveness. Thirty-eight years old, stocky, muscled, rugged-ugly, with an unsettling charm that comes from a poetic, perverse, avidly curious mind. Disturbing because while his talk is compelling, fantastic, hypnotic, I can never be sure how much of it is mendacious and satirical.

Last night he transfixed me with a tale of shooting a kangaroo in Australia. He shot him (he said, with passionate sincerity) against his finer instincts. Which also forbid him to shoot deer and elephants. "You couldn't make me shoot an elephant," he declared, and eyed me accusingly as if I had tried. "An elephant is a gentle tender animal."

The kangaroo, shot squarely between the eyes, gave a prodigious leap of more than thirty feet, and died.

"Imagine, a death leap," he said. "But you couldn't make me shoot *another* kangaroo, not for a million dollars!" And he surveyed me challengingly, as if I had the money ready in my pocket.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What bothered me was that I knew he actually had spent considerable time in Australia, and that he was a crack marksman. He practices often on a pistol range he has out here. But I speculated that this yarn was simply a savagely contemptuous way of proving to himself that I was a gullible fool, or too cowardly to say I thought he was a liar. He and I have had this particular passage before, with variations. Then too, it's a peculiarly southern thing, they have perfected the fine art of lying with flair.

Anyway, when I drifted into the joint (with the price of one beer in my pocket) and auditioned, he hired me to play the piano. For the first week, during intermissions, I sat and drank with him, while he questioned me about myself. Did it so deftly, deviously, sympathetically, that I gave him more of the truth than I otherwise might have.

His drinking is a methodical, curiously joyless affair, leading to moods that veer from lyrical to sardonic to ugly. The next day, with the same cold precision and concentration, he lifts weights, rides a horse, shoots a pistol, swims, and shows no trace of the night's dissipation. I drink only moderately now, and I don't join him in getting bagged. In a way I'm afraid to.

I had only worked a few nights at the club when Dan informed me that he didn't want me living at the Reverend Ryan's. Actually I'd been prowling a little on my own, and wanted to move into the Dock Street Theatre building (Charleston's bohemia; I met a couple interesting types there). But he moved me out on the island with him.

It's about twenty miles out of Charleston, in the Sound, the open ocean nearby. These are the haunted brooding Carolina lowlands, the tidewater country where the stalwart pioneers displayed false shore lights in order to wreck and plunder ships. Our Murcan heritage. Dan pointed out another island, low on the horizon, which still has Civil War fortifications. The South will rise again.

I'd say this island is only some twenty-five acres, if that. Dan owns the whole tiny continent, the fief of his ancestors. There's a big house where Dan stays, beautiful, ghostly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decadent (sinking into the sand), and I live in an old slave hut "fixed up." There are never any callers, not so far, and we are the sole inhabitants, outside of the "Nigras." All day the stillness is massive, pervasive, dense, except for the pistol shots when he practices, and these trifling noises seem to drown immediately. The atmosphere seems to be waiting, waiting.

From my windows I can see for unbroken miles—miles of water and sky and lonely marshland. Nothing moves but the fishing birds, wheeling languidly in the air, and the palmettos, fanning themselves in the heat. Waiting, waiting.

I try to tell myself *toujours l'audace*, but I don't like at all what I feel. You should have sent me the bread, and by now I'd be safe with some Rush Street Mafia hoodlum in Chicago. I don't know about these southern aristocrats. There's an old Arabian proverb I just made up: "Lie down with the adder, get up sadder."

alors, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
AUGUST 3, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

Because I'm thinking of you and wishing I could be with you in Chicago this morning, I'm making do with this. If it gets rather magenta, forgive, this exile is a much-tried pilgrim.

It is five a.m., the birds are stirring in the palms outside and from the windows I can see the first smoke-gray light of day, turning to silver the dark quiet waters of the sound.

The grizzly who owns this island departed about an hour ago, pleased with himself and his world, and I'm left vibrating and wishing myself far from him and this hostile geechee country.

His name is Dan, one of the Huguenots of Charleston, thirtyish, muscled, an arresting ugliness, befurred like the bear. Nor was it the physical charms that put me where I am. Rather it was the cunning, intelligence, deviousness and imagination of the scoundrel that arrested me. That and the need for bread to maneuver on this burning deck.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He owns the Magnolia, the joint where I play. It's a reproduction of a Carolina-style patio, common brick and wrought iron, deep leather booths, murky darkness, and I furnish the unobtrusive piano music. Aside from a discreet sign outside, there's no indication at all of a night club. Underplayed all the way, which results in SRO all the time, and the host's consistently inimical attitude towards customers merely charms them the more.

Wouldn't you think, from all this, as many gutters as I've been in, that I would gather there was a mind at work? Not that there was a hell of a lot of choice at first, I fell into the joint one night, a month or so out of jail, broke and on my ass, played the piano, was hired. Beautiful piano, sharp club, cordial reception from the aristocrats assembled. Terms were attractive, and I felt I'd finally landed, escaping disaster and the looming threat of return to jail. Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly.

I wish now I'd never left the Rock in Florida, but this maniac didn't come on like a maniac at first.

I should have suspected something from the attitude of the rich rebels that haunt the joint, touched with awe, pathetically glad when he warms to cordiality and offers them a drink. Methodically, he plies everyone around him, occupying his booth like a throne at a levee, the wit and charm flows freely, and there is laughing it up while he sparkles.

Not till he drove me home the first night, sober in an instant, did I discover the wiliness, the savagery of his method. In their innocent faith and drunkenness his companions were but specimens for observation. With cold satisfaction he estimated in what way this or that friend was vulnerable and dispensable, how far from ruin and collapse. This engaging misanthrope was compiling for them a dossier of doom.

I was intrigued by such bland villainy, but chilled, and decided to keep as much distance as was compatible with keeping the job.

It took some skating. Being lonely and strange, I looked about for something interesting in a southern gent. They all seemed to adore my playing and were eager to be friends. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

settled on a couple of actors from the Dock Street Theatre. The older one, improbably called Julian Ravenal, had a face ancient with weary satiety; his beautiful young companion a face of placid dreaming wickedness. There was not a doubt in my mind that we three could wind up in some piquant erotic arrangement, the winter seemed made, so hungry was I for just such raffish companions after a long starvation.

The three of us seated at the bar, Dan passed by, swept us casually with a glance, stopped, said to Julian, "I want to see you." Julian murmured, "I know what the son of a bitch will say." I never discovered what that was, but that night after work, Dan said, "If you're really in earnest about wanting to write, Charleston's not the place for you. I want you to see where I live."

He brought me out to the island that morning. It was still dark, the stars were on top of us, the Atlantic breeze murmured in the palms, the waters of the sound whispered liquidly. Naturally, I was enchanted.

He brought out the liquor and stayed to talk (in the small house he said I should "try"). Talked amiably, winningly, mostly of the arts, and without halting the flow of urbanity, complained of the heat and stripped to his shorts. (It may have been the record, "Alborado del Gracioso.") He kept the talk spinning, but the bronzed hairy maleness of him was making the air crackle around me, as difficult to inhale as noodle soup. And while the bastard was gauging his effect, my treacherous face was selling me out. Even while I reached frantically for a coherent reply to some damnable observation he'd made on Christopher Fry, I could read a small tinge of pity in the green eyes as they weighed the imminence of my collapse.

Oh well. I encountered some variations he must have picked up from a Bedouin camel-skinner in one of the murkier streets of Tangier. Even in the holocaust, it crossed my mind that he could not bear to be bested in anything and was satisfying himself that in this, too, I was a mere dabbler. It was an excursion into eroticism along roads I never saw on any map. The calm steady dispassionate degradation and debasement, sure, strong, relentless. When it was done—this silent,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contemptuous and curiously onanistic performance—the first daylight was rising over the water. I had been coolly employed, crumpled and discarded like a Kleenex.

Sated, sure of one more egg in the basket, he paced the floor, outlining a program of reclamation and renovation. Regarding me with mixed distaste and pity, "Your hair is too long, too—musicianish." Twined spatulate fingers in it, nearly lifting my scalp. "Uglier than I am," he mused. "You're a find, a positive find." Then, "Cut your hair. At the Magnolia, you won't look hired. You should look like a performing amateur, like a guest sitting down to amuse your friends. Then your professional sound will come as an irritating surprise to your listeners."

He looked at me with distress. "And your clothes... well, tomorrow we'll cut your hair and get you some sunburn." On, and on.

He paused, only then aware of my anger and embarrassment, and measured it. I had a strength he knew nothing about: I was wishing I was back in jail. Sensing the hidden reserve, he retreated. "It's only sensible, Mr. Blake—" He brayed the long A as Charlestonians do, and drew a smile from me. "I won't have those moribund bastards sniping at you while you're working for me. I intend to see you succeed in the job, and while I'm behind you they won't dare anything but like you. And nobody but me understands what you're doing."

A formal bow. "I'll be over in the afternoon, if it won't disturb you at your writing. If you need anything, press the button, and one of the Nigras will come."

The Nigras... Thus I was appropriated, another weapon in his war with Charleston. When I awoke, it was to gunfire. He was killing the phantom enemy on the pistol range.

Numb with shock, catatonic with dread, I ventured timidly into the kitchen to make myself some coffee. There was brandy left in the bottle, I had a couple of Dexies, and I gulped it all against the fearful appearance.

When he showed, it was in riding habit, looking as wide and high as Cyclops. He coolly recorded the degree of my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confusion, but his manner was bantering, lightly paternal, there was no sign of the previous night's fever. "Jupiter and I had a good ride, I feel great." He looked closer at me. "Maybe you should eat something. I thought we'd go into town later."

Benevolent commands. The grand seigneur and the poverty-struck transient he has just remembered sheltering in the storm. A nuisance, but noblesse oblige.

Rattled, distrait, I scrambled to escape. "No need to hurry, I brought some trunks, thought we might swim a little first. It's good for a hangover."

So we swam and lay in the sun while he talked quietly, putting the unaccountable waif at ease. Showed me the big house. "My brother left some clothes here. He's about like you. Try them on, those trousers of yours sag in the ass. Is that what they gave you when you left the pen? A shame."

I stand for inspection. He appears to have forgotten me. "Oh yea, much better. By the way. Did you register as an ex-convict when you came into Charleston? State law, six months and a fine. I can probably arrange something. The cops in this town are venal as hell. I wouldn't worry about it."

I look at him. The velvet threat.

So here I am—trapped, beset, lonely, bored, frightened and confused. I don't know anybody except momentarily. We live alone on the island with only the jigs, all starry-eyed for Mistah Dan. "Pappy wuhk for Mistah Dan's daddy. He a caution, Mistah Dan, yuk, yuk, yuk."

But you know something? When I play piano, he listens. And he understands. *Que voulez-vous?* Later, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
August 22, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

...The natives of this geechee territory eat rice three times a day, and all the time in between, and they talk about a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain kind of black that is a "good southern nigra, always uses 'Mister.' " Ugh. The fools. I do not think they have taken a good look at blacks as persons for some time, these ingrown insular aristocrats of Charleston. I look closely at the spades as I walk the streets—they are really so much better looking than whites, black is a more suitable color for skin, and in the great majority of them, I sense a secret merriment, an amused contempt. Charleston blacks, many of them, ride around in gigantic new automobiles. I daresay this is because the economy is rather frantic down here, and credit is easier. For everybody but musicians.

I think perhaps the spades are better off here, the weather is kinder, and certainly there is something softer about the Catfish Row type of thing as contrasted with the grim phalanxes of tenements one sees in Chicago. At least there is room for small kitchen gardens, and there is not the grinding pressure of urban existence. Then, too, the blacks have taken refuge in the masquerade of "good nigras" and if there is anything satirical in calling everybody Mister the benighted whites are not hip to it.

I've met several students at the State College for blacks at Orangeburg, rather straight-up types, in a way, from the ones I knew in Florida, but of course that's understandable; the spades I knew in the Rock were felons. These are waiters at the Magnolia, and they seem to be on the track of onward and upward and easy does it. From them there is little talk of revolt and equal rights, they allow the Carolinians their heavy paternalistic role as protectors of "good nigras" from the NAACP. It's possible they don't relate to me because they know my relation with Dan. But one of them who hangs a little looser told me that Dan pays their tuition at college. According to this cat, Dan told them, "If you're going to hang around here, you're not going to remain niggers all your lives." It's a clue, but what do it mean?

I've been dabbling around with writing a few little things, but my obsession with Dan hangs over me and keeps me off balance, and I'll probably never do anything until I'm away from him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To please him (or rather because I daren't displease him), I have become the complete piano player of the Magnolia Room, clipped, sunburned, my summer suit as rumpled as any on the Battery. He is pleased at his handiwork, sardonically amused when the frosty Charlestonians inspect the Outlander who has come so mysteriously to resemble a native, an object of speculation instead of "Dan's itinerant."

Maybe if we were not so much together... I go into town with him in time for work, come back in the morning with him. We turn the phonograph on, leaving the music to wail as accompaniment for anarchy in the dark. He uses the sexual pull he knows he has for me like Pentothal, on the theory that what I evade in the light I will confess in the dark. It would be idle to disabuse him of this notion, in view of the fact that I'm so bloody hooked.

And yet when we lie quiet and the shaggy heat of him is beside me, I feel a precarious love and desire for this tormentor, and I could cry at the wrongness of the reasons we are together. Once I pressed my lips into the tangled hair of his wrist, a silent plea for him to be different. It made him furious, his scorn was horrible, it withered me, and petrified me lest he send me away.

Thus the happy life of the carefree childlike islanders. How many times I have wished myself back in the joint, the perfect peace I had and did not value. The time to read and write, and goof in the sun, to play the piano indifferently or ferociously as I chose. There are nights at the Magnolia when I'm hacked, or simply inert, and can't play, and he stops at the piano and says, what's wrong with you? And there are other nights, when I have really been wailing. The joint closes, he locks the doors, and I play for him. His taste is impeccable, it is a joy. And I think, this motherfucker is attuned to me, but for what, *à quoi bon?* For the sardonic, hateful regard we have for one another?

Sometimes I think all this tohu-bohu is superficial, meaningless, that I am pointed inexorably toward Florida and fated to return there. Je meurs, Jim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charleston, South Carolina
August 24, 1956

[To Tom Rolfe, Raiford State Prison]

Dear Tombeau:

You're a horrible person to get letters from. Sample: "You told me plenty in your last letter—more than you know." What kind of a crack is that? I went around all day mumbling, What I Say, What I Say?

All that blackbird-croaking about my not writing. I'll get to it; right now I'm making a living playing piano, and some other things. Meanwhile I learn, absorb, suffer, exult. Much to explore in your native state, ponder, inhale, examine.

It is 7 a.m., The Boss has just left, we've been listening to classical records and talking about the club and the demented, depraved and just plain dull people that infest the joint. Relations with my boss have improved; it's perhaps only a temporary truce, but nice; I should like to live without the small abrasions that we gratuitously inflict and are inflicted with. But I feel a necessity to do battle occasionally—in the past, as you know, I have mislaid my identity by subordinating my own interests to those of another, and I'm determined that, if possible, never again....

The Paris Review has come up with the bread at long last (and how desperately I needed it in June, it could have changed the course of history), the stuff will appear in the upcoming issue. I've waited so long, hoped so much, all I feel now is depleted.

I will tap a can of beer and go for a swim, and perhaps together they will rout the sleeplessness that has been dogging me and making me tight and irritable. I can't afford it. Friday night is heavy at the Magnolia, the debutantes and blades of Charleston will be thick in my hair. I wish I didn't find it so damnably hard to be affable, but honestly I look at people and all I see are jaws, wagging wagging. How I envy your peace and quiet. How does one go about applying for entrance?

Your buddy, Jim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charleston, South Carolina
August 28, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

The dismaying rush of partisan feeling I had when I read your description of Dan ("pistol-popping sadist") told me all I needed to know about where I stand. I feel trapped—all right—I'm struggling. But if I disparaged him it was in a puerile attempt to find strength in a petty resentment, the witless malediction of a scolding crow.

I know this about myself from past involvements, from boats I have missed, challenges I have ignored—that when strong demands are made upon me, demands that disconcert and frighten me, I find a way to evade. And having found it, I find a way to explain my cowardice.

It was a selfishly motivated, incomplete and inaccurate picture of Dan. Behind all his behavior, I think, is the fact that pretense enrages him blindly, and he wants to shake me out of what he considers my dream of existence. After one of those soul-scouring encounters, I will admit that I feel some of the mistiness of my mind has been seared away. What I feel is beyond shame or guilt, or even embarrassment: I know that his homosexuality is like my own, in that it is a matter of attraction between two masculine minds, and not a tinsel thing in which one of them must pretend to be a woman.

Cruel or not is irrelevant, there is a vast uneasiness and torment in the man, a bottled loneliness. Of course I know that the desperation implicit in this kind of alliance will strangle it as a matter of course, and that will be the end of it. Meanwhile, there are the times when we talk and know mutual understanding. For me, slippery and rackety as I am, it has been a revelation to find someone so obsessed with honesty. I don't mean the B. Franklin thing reputed to be the "best policy," but scorching scalding merciless truth. He fights the world for it.

If he is determined to find out what makes me what I am,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there are two ends to that telescope. This is a highly charged articulate man who has not yet brought himself to utter the secret of his disenchantment. Love, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
August 26, 1956

Dear Nelson:

I was just barely within reach of sleep this morning about daylight when there came a diffident but insistent tapping on the door of my small house.

I had whipped myself up to fiddle-string tautness the night before, playing in the Magnolia Room of Dan's Indoor Gutter—through the judicious use of chemicals of one kind and another—and had exhausted myself, physically and otherwise, performing for my public.

Really it is ridiculous how these provincial bog-trotters have me confused with Liberace or somebody—everybody pays such *livid* attention. I'd prefer to play as the mood moved me, carefully or haphazardly, with passion or indifference, depending on how I was feeling, but my god how these bankrupt individuals *listen*. It makes the air ache.

Indecent, and quite wrong. In all my previous experience, the pub-crawlers and barflies have always been too preoccupied with greasy little private intrigues to pay much attention to the piano player. Which is as it should be. This popeyed, pathetic inhaling the music is something new to me.

It's a burden, I have to be "on" too much of the time otherwise, things being as they are. This fierce hungry interest from an audience is disconcerting. I find myself constantly overblowing the gig.

All of which is merely to say I was very tired when the tapping came at my door. When it increased in volume to a peremptory pounding, I really grew apprehensive, it had the sinister sound of fuzz. But the rising daylight gave me courage, and I went to the door.

It was Ralph and Rosalie. Looking for a handout, display-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing the bland cockeyed optimism they always assume on these occasions.

Ralph is a big white gander and Rosalie is sort of a buff-colored goose with the massive complacency that suffuses a female who is confident she's a good lay. They are the leaders of a flock of geese Dan keeps on the island. For kicks, purely, and they are all of that. A more militantly opinionated reactionary mob you never saw. But volatile. They can go from swaggering waddling assurance to gibbering panic in a single blazing instant for no discernible reason.

And they have embarked on a calculated campaign to undermine me. I can't pass them, as they patrol the island on their restless aimless excursions, without they try to make something of it. They suffer me to pass with only a vague bridling and ruffling of feathers, and a certain sotto voce muttering—and then there arises a chorus of anathema and alarm like a hundred spinsters discovering burglars under a hundred beds, like all the Sabines hollering rape.

Ralph and Rosalie, being more diplomatic and devious, abstain from this maneuver of terror and intimidation. Being practical fowl, they do not indulge themselves in open enmity when, with a superficial show of affability, they can get cheesecrackers, sausages and pretzels.

So we have established a wary detente, we three. Ralph drops by at odd times, elaborately casual, accompanied by his paramour, informs me by clearing his throat that he's out there, and lets the unvoiced threat hang in the air. And I sustain the charade, greet him with forced joviality and pay enough tribute to placate him.

But his calling at the ungodly hour of daybreak was really overplaying his hand, and while I evinced no surprise at the hour, I think we both knew he had weakened his position. He took the pretzels I gave him with a certain shamefaced air.

The fall of a prince, even a despot, is saddening, and the bleak loneliness of the hour made it even more poignant. Sic semper tyrannis.

Later, Jim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charleston, South Carolina
September 23, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

I've just returned from seeing Great Man off at the airport; he's invading Miami for a couple of days. I shall be alone here for a while, well not alone exactly, the nigras are about. It's profoundly sad, how they are, the crushing paternalism of the Caro-leenians has emasculated them. Dan doesn't share the attitude, I don't know how many times I've seen him in a bursting rage at them, hollering, "God damn you, are you going to stay a nigger all your life?"

I got a glimpse of the old-school outlook on the race thing the day I met Dan's mother, very grande-dame vague sort, with the kind of measured politeness that seems like a studied insult. She lives in one of the monstrous architectural atrocities that overlook the Charleston harbor.

She had quite a bit to say concerning the loving care Carolinians have always given their black charges. Added, with exquisite courtesy, and deadly grace, that of course I was a Yankee and that my outlook was perhaps "different." Meaning wrong. As she spoke of the halcyon days of her girlhood on the plantation, I seemed to be looking down an endless and hellish-dark tunnel of years to the leisurely sunlit scene her words evoked. Banjos strummin', darkies a-hummin', EEEEE. I felt chilled.

Since she pressed me for my views, I tried as calmly as possible to present the musician's attitude, that if a man can't blow his axe it don't matter what shade he is, and if he can, let him be striped. That handsome old beast nodded with every evidence of warm agreement. And later told Dan not to bring any more nigger-lovers home with him. Naturally, I knew before I went into it that the whole meeting was an arrangement to give him his kicks. That's my main man.

Anyway, I intend to fly a little while I'm on my own, though I know the darkies will be a-hummin' to Dan when he gets back. I've met three Navy musicians, and I invited them out to the island today. All fine musicians and wonder-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fully disparate types. They're stationed here with the Navy band. The bass man is from Tallahassee, built like a fullback, but he is swingin' murder on the bass. He brings his axe into the club often (Dan hates him) and we gas one another. Though I take issue with him from time to time on the current vogue for bass men to play a line which has only a distant connection with the harmonic structure of the tunes. I don't mean to beef, but whatever happened to the tonic and dominant?

The other two sailors are trombone men from New York, and do pretty well at the Kai-J.J. kind of thing. One's a tough, muscled, belligerent Polack, the other—who really delights me—is an incredibly gentle and earnest boy with enormous wondering brown eyes and a lock of hair that falls over his forehead.

Name of Lou. He has a hi-fi outfit that is his pride, which he keeps in an apartment in town which he and the bass man share. I wanted to give them a record, and cast about for something that would be really provocative and also show them what a cultured sonbitch I really am. I settled for an album of The Firebird and Pictures at an Exhibition. Lou put it on the machine and I settled back to bask in the touching wonder and gratitude of these lovable peasants. My effect was marred by the fact that the Polack could sing Pictures note for note, and they were all far more familiar with Firebird than I have ever been. Sometimes I stupefy myself.

No hurricane yet, though I keep hoping, and so does Dan. It may be that he has gone to Miami to see what's holding it up; he takes a firm line in these things.

Ralph and Rosalie, the demented panhandling geese, have permanently adopted me; they live outside my door and wait for the happenings. If I ignore them too long, Ralph bangs on the door with his nose. Also a mouse has moved in with me, called Motherfucker. He picks the moment when my hangovers are crucial and I am in my bare feet to scuttle across the floor on some cataleptic excursion. My heart will stop one of these times, never to go again. And when I'm trying to sleep he's busy in the kitchen, moving furniture, slamming doors,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dismantling the stove. How such a tiny critter can sound like six burglars beats me. zut alors, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
SEPTEMBER 25, 1956

Dear Mike:

There you are, Horseman. About time. Stay your steed. Nelson told me you been horsing around (sue me) from coast to coast. I missed you. Lots of happenings, chiefly grim.

Remember that hurricane in Miami? It's 3 a.m. here and my small island home is being clobbered by a storm from Hurricane Flossie. Outside, there is a cosmic uproar—rain lashing, surf crashing, palms thrashing—and all over the howling of the wind.

Inside, all is snug. I've put The Buried Cathedral on the phonograph and its serenity nicely complements the roaring without. All I need is a taste of grass, alas.

This island idyll may soon cease, however. Weather bureau says that high tide will be higher by ten feet. The crest is due in about five hours. I don't know the elevation of the island, but since my little hut sits perilous close to the water, I may end up in a palmetto.

Dan, my boss, my heartsease, my cross, is away in Miami for a few days, and I'm sole inhabitant, except for a gaggle of nigras, all Toms. Dan says he emancipated them long ago but they're hanging around waiting for the word to murder us in bed.

It appears that turbulence is still the pattern for me. However, against the upheavals I've been trying to gather a getaway fund, for when it gets over my eyebrows. The stash grows slowly, but it grows. As soon as I've got it to the point where I can feel reasonably secure, I'll do something about returning some of the bread you sent me. But I hope I never again have to run as fast as I did when I got out of the joint. Bit snug in the crotch, that was.

If I can ride this riff through the winter (and it's iffy) I'll

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stay here. If not, probably I'll make the Miami scene. Don't dig that Yankee weather any more. My playing is stronger and more assured, I think, than it has ever been. (You called it "peo-zallid," remember?) Which is ironic, aside from listening to others blow, I have little interest in jazz any more.

A number of people up there I would like to see again—there's a lot of loneliness in this exile bit. But if I'm ever to stand alone and get something done, I have to learn to find strength in solitude. The sad wild beauty of this place is a help—I feel a need to measure up. Like to hear from you again, dear Michaelo. You coming South this year? later, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
October 17, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

Mahler no. 1 is on the radio from D.C., that all-night program of cultured stuff sponsored by an airline. I find the program plays in most large cities within range of my radio. And it makes me wonder, knowing that business types like airline wheels are notoriously astute. What I want to know is, whom, please, are they aiming at? Well, dig. They're looking for a customer who is presumably up and about at the dubious hour of 4 a.m. And one who likes to hear classical music at that ungodly time. It seems to me that anybody with these qualifications is up to no damn good at all, and certainly he'd be a poor risk for any decent airline. Lot of money going down the drain there.

Another storm has been announcing itself. The wind rising all day yesterday, whipping rods of rain before it. Till now it's howling and singing in the palmettos outside. This is not the grimy sly wind that whines around the buildings of the city. This is the wind where it gets a chance to wail. Roaring in off the water, miles of open marsh to run in, it hits the trees with a strong wild song, it pulls me inside out to stand in it and listen to it.

I ran into a horrible bird the other day. Here in this country

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sky is never empty of a hawk or a vulture, always delicately gliding, always watching. Since there's a number of giddy fowl on this island, the hawks make it a point to keep an eye on it.

I was walking down the road to the mailbox, hoping for opium in the mail. Walking along, I met the geese, strangely silent for once, and running for their lives. If you've never seen anything with webbed feet getting out from under, they travel, it's a kind of rubbery haste, but they make it.—I had a terrible hangover, the air seemed to be made of spun brass—and the sight of the terror-struck geese didn't help at all.

Up in the air, hanging directly over me, was a monster of a hawk, a peregrine. Remember Wescott's "Pilgrim Hawk." I thought of it as I looked up at this hovering giant. He didn't seem at all pleased to see me. And followed overhead as I walked. He'd rise and soar for a few minutes, then come whistling down out of the sky, and brake, as if he'd changed his mind. Then continued hanging over me, and by this time I'm stumbling in the sand, keeping an eagle eye on this hawk. The second run he made, I knew this bastard had me in mind, and I looked frantically for something solid to whack him with when he came down.

And oh my god my head was splitting and I thought what a raunchy way to go. Finally I spotted a stout stick, and standing in the middle of the road I brandished it like Prometheus inviting the lightning. This cat really had me scared shitless, I had visions of my eyes pecked out by this flying serpent. And above all was the picture of myself fighting this preposterous bird, the utter appalling humiliation of it. I mean, so *feathered.*

I fought the sky that day. later, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
October 26, 1956

Dear Nelson:

I just dug The Paris Review, and want to thank you for all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you did. The way it's edited, it makes me look like Jean Harlow. And placed next to Genet. Not only a damaging comparison, it's like being buried next to the Pope.

It may be damaging, I dunno. Reading him, I was struck by how perilous it is to be a poet.

I'm still trying to make it here and resisting the awful temptation to go back to the peace and quiet of the Rock. The Owner is, for him, more or less patient and sympathetic, but I've met a couple Navy musicians who complicate things some.

The bass man is a great hostile neanderthal, plays his ass off on bass, and thinks I stink. And there's a large brown-eyed trombone player, who thinks I don't. I don't think he does either.

At the Magnolia, I'm supposed to play chic chandelier music, I think it's called inconspicuous, unobtrusive, something like that, and when the bassist and trombonist come in, things take a turn jazzwise, and the Owner prowls unhappily.

You got any idea where I can book a trio, bass trombone piano? hung, Jim

Charleston, South Carolina
October 28, 1956

Dear ——:

I'm several kinds of jerk for not writing sooner to thank you for the heaven-sent god's medicine. Things just move too fast lately. I'm trying to keep the Owner happy and at the same time trying to chase a brown-eyed trombone player from the Navy. There has been a certain degree of success in the chase.

Thing is, if I keep on as I'm going, I know Dan will flip, and I'll be out. I've thought of moving into town but every morning when we come back from there, the stars are overhead within reaching distance, the water stretches into silver infinity, the wind sighs in the palmettos—how can I leave?

It's lonely, lonely as blazes; Dan spends maybe an hour or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two with me when we come home, and for the rest of the time I'm alone.

So often I wish for somebody like you to see this country with me. In Wisconsin, the country always suggested vitality, virility—here as I ride my bicycle around, I'm struck by the pervading air of sadness and defeat. A dying kind of country, such sad pale beauty, it invades me.

And then from that, having to cope with the brisk pragmatism of this stud I'm with—I have a hell of a time shifting gears. And so often lately I feel the stirring of mutiny, and it's so goddam foolish.

You know what's in my mind? The joint. I thought I was getting off free from that experience. I thought they hadn't managed to touch me, but it colors every moment and every action of my life. I think always of the peace that I had there—this working to survive and surviving to work seems increasingly like an arrangement I would not have chosen, were it up to me. Those gates, man, they're inviting. So much lovely time stretches out before you, time to read, to write, to play, to practice, to speculate, contemplate—and without the idiot necessity to Hold Up Your End. It is so well understood, the lines are so definitely drawn; I am Society and you are Not, and there is such a weary patience with nonconforming, it is infinitely restful.

I had the first inkling of this feeling when I used to go outside the fence with the band to play at dances for the club that was made up of hacks and officials of the joint. And their wives, their truly horrible wives, and their misbegotten children. They had a clubhouse across the road from the joint, and we were taken over there under guard from time to time to furnish music for these drab and sinister festivals. How many times, as I sat at the piano during these rigadoons, have I thought, I don't belong here, I belong over there, locked in with my tribe.

ever, Jim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charleston, South Carolina
October 28, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

I've made up my mind to move into town. Probably a stupid move, entirely in character. It's just that, beautiful as it is, there's a trapped feeling about it. I can't go much of anywhere unless Dan takes me, and visitors aren't encouraged. I'm stifling. (And I can't bear any bloody more heartbreak.)

I know that I will leave Dan and all this with a genuine reluctance. (What the hell is it with me that I can't stand to close a door behind me?) There have been many irritations, many of them my fault, but there has also been an honest sensuality that I hardly hoped to find in this winter of my discontent.

The marsh grass has turned to undulating stripes of color with the turn of the season, the island is a riot of goldenrod, and some kind of late-blooming bush that came out at first demurely gray, then burst into clouds of white. I've been riding my bike along the ocean shore. The water is beginning its winter tantrum, and the sight of the empty beach, so lately festive, is piercing. In the side roads, huge oaks veiled in Spanish moss, palmetto trees weary of life and condemned to it. Specters rise on every hand, abandoned houses, desolate hamlets, over all the dead hand of a climate too kind.

Rosalie is at the door, raising hell with her bill. She is alone now; Ralph has put her down, and she is exiled from the flock. They peck her unmercifully when she tries to approach. It is slowly driving her out of her wits and her behavior grows increasingly strange. She wanders alone, sometimes far into the night. Wandering myself in the night, I have been painfully startled at times by a sudden violent hissing—the mad Rosalie, poisoned by love. Feeling somehow allied with her, I am now supporting her, and she is the most independent dependent I ever saw.

As for me, several times now I've told Dan I want to leave. Violence the first couple of times. Then a kind of gentle ominous tolerance that is even harder to take. Why should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I resist domination at this late date, when it brings me closer to security than I have been for a long time, passes understanding. Who knows? later, Jim

Hotel ——
NOVEMBER 21, 1956

Dear Gertrude:

So ends the Carolina caprice. Tomorrow I split for Florida, to meet a former fellow shut-in. He has promised that if we make one good score, we'll settle down in Key West and allow me to fight the typewriter.

I have to make the move. The sponsor got real brittle about l'affaire trombone. He didn't fire me, I quit, things were getting a little operatic. He can shoot the nose off a mosquito, and both of us were staying drunk all the time.

There is a time to sit and a time to split. Strange thing is, I really don't like trombone music all that much. The big brown eyes did me in.

Well, it has been an enlightening time. I'm leaving the town not a hell of a lot better than I entered it. Oh, all kinds of property, which is a pain in the ass, just something more to carry, but I suppose I need a front for the phony Florida scene.

Truly, though, I feel more zestful than I have felt for a while. Perils of the open road and all that. What am I, Zigeuner? General Delivery, Jax, till I find out something.

Later, Jim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John Koethe

A Sunday Drive

Two gallons of apple cider.
A jar of pungent, pasty Yankee mustard.
"Two dollars please." Boys on bikes
Are scattered around the entrance to the store.

Cold leaf smoke floats over
A toadstool-proportioned water tank
Perched slightly off to the left of Route 2.

"Are these houses mostly old or new?
I usually can't tell the difference myself."

So we were continuing down this road
Which was like a hallway whose walls were trees
And whose ceiling was open to the sky.

Large birds were browsing in the sky.

"Her character is slightly slummy
But it conceals a kindness of such concentration
Nothing shivers—not even a single leaf—
When she casts her lot where she may."

Hardly any leaves are left on the trees.
The pines, with their eternal, sickly green,
Are stuck like bottle brushes in the rack
Of the other, occasional bloomers.

"Saws Sharpened."
"The First Lutheran Church Welcomes You."

We can't find the way back, but we do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jim Dine

The Standard Bear

the release of Regis Debray
Paris: the release of R. Debray from his protective
reaction for the first time (mush mouth)
gives experience to the young world
the release of Debray, a serious health nut, with a high profile
turned left at O.K. Sauces

"oo la la," shouts Regis, as the lovely Marlena goes into her
last Richard Tauber medley

Sophie his sister shouts
"what's in a name"

Debray and Guevara
play baseball in the eastern rain forest
they spread revolution thru good fielding there
letting Debray go thru South America as
romantic principles in the far-off jungles of the Amazon
think up nicknames for the young Debray boy

a signal!!!!
he wants to have a child
sooooooooooo off to Johns Hopkins on the first plane out of
La Paz
for the operation
first the genitalia is removed and massive
doses of female hormones are shot into him
as his breasts begin to grow
the hole is made and lined
with the skin of his glans penis. wonderful
shouts mister in between
dont mess with me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Guevara notes acidly in his diary
the frenchman could be outside
everyone immediately rushes outside screaming, "Reeegis,"
"oh Mister Deeebrayyyy"
Debray flinches at the sound
he has had little contact with shouting voices these past 3
years in the can
the 29 year old teacher seems at first to be angry
but really its just flamboyance as the archbishop of Paris
would have said to say Cendrars or even Stephane Grappelly
fiddling his ass off for the crying Django Reinhardt also
in a Bolivian jail all these years along with Hitler and Martin
Bormann

Councilwoman Debray, Regis's mother, has or that is did
plead his case
but the princes appeared quite unconcerned and said
"the winter season is beginning in real earnest"
1. summer weather now!
2. rent all the villas!
3. fill the hotels!
4. more tango!
5. and rockabye sweet baby james (sung)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Travel Dust

two eggs follow me to the Food Derby
I set my sights on toast and loads of tea and pumpkin seeds
mix with 4 or 5 grapes in my mouth
so I have the energy to breathe
going real slow
by foot
down river
to smell fumes belching out of you in Moscow
there would be heavy guards around your smokestacks
here the interior is painted cream with a pale blue trim
all the greasy machines get down on their knees to spray hearts on clear plastic
the red rubber rim covered by my jock strap
and an old sock
soup meat tramps along
my throat with horseradish already there to receive the mixture
pumpkin seeds again and sky with a few grapes and now an inch of yogurt
it seals off the chest fumes
the spray bomb lays down a silver heart on the dirt
kissed by a red nail
silver removes the stencil, reverses it, then acetone hits the yogurt puddle
smack on the sycamores stick to my face
the Thames washes eels up.
they carry me to the pavement
letting it all melt at my feet like tigers
pumpkin seeds and lime stone drip along the sidewalk
a few more lunatic hearts appear celebrating Ron Padgett & Reverdy & Sky
the scum of which is silver mixed with green
tomatoes bubble on the stove to prepare for the lemon colored moth
that just this minute came alive on your forehead smiling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ted Berrigan

Things to Do in Providence

Crash

Take valium Sleep

Dream &

forget it.

*

Wake up new & strange

displaced

at home.

Read The Providence Evening Bulletin

no one you knew

got married
had children
got divorced
died

got born

tho many familiar names flicker &
disappear

*

Sit

watch tv

draw blanks

swallow

pepsi
meatballs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

give yourself the needle:

Shit! There's gotta be something to do
here!"

★

JOURNEY TO SHILOH:

Seven young men on horses, leaving Texas. They've got to do what's right! So, after a long trip, they'll fight for the South in the War. No war in Texas, but they've heard about it & they want to fight for their country: have some adventures, & make their folks proud! Two hours later, all are dead. One by one they died, stupidly & they never did find out why! There were no niggers in South Texas! Their leader alone, with one arm shot off, survives, to head back to Texas, all his friends left behind, dead. What will happen?

★

Watching, I cry big tears. His friends were beautiful, with boyish American good manners, cowboys!

★

Telephone New York: "Hello!"

"Hello! I'm drunk! &
I have no clothes on!"

"My goodness," I say.

"See you tomorrow."

★

Wide awake all night reading: The Life of Turner
("He first saw the light in
Maiden Lane.")

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A. C. Becker: Wholesale Jewels
Catalogue 1912
The Book of Marvels 1934: The year
I was born.

No mention of my birth in here. Hmmmm.

Saturday The Rabbi Stayed Home

(that way he got to solve the murder)

LIFE on the Moon by LIFE Magazine

★

Now my mother wakes up, 4 a.m.: Someone to talk with!

Over coffee we chat, two grownups
I have two children, I'm an adult now, too.
Now we are two people talking who have known
one another a long time
like Edwin & Rudy. Our talk is a great pleasure: my
mother
a spunky woman; her name was Peggy Dugan
when she was young.
Now, 61 years old, she blushes to tell me I was
conceived
before the wedding: "I've always been embarrassed
about telling you,
til now," she says. "I didn't know what you might
think!"
"I think it's really sweet," I say. "It means I'm
really
a love child." She too was conceived before her
mother's wedding,
I know. We talk, daylight comes, & The Providence
Morning Journal.
My mother leaves for work. I'm still here.

★

Put out the cat

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Take in the clothes
off the line

Take a walk
buy cigarettes

*

two teen-agers whistle
as I walk up

They say: "only your hairdresser
knows for sure!"

Then they say

"ulp!"

because I am closer to them.
They see I am not hippie kid, frail & knock-kneed,
but some horrible 35 year old big guy,

The neighborhood I live in is mine!

"How'd you kids like your heads broken?"
I say fiercely.

(but I am laughing & they are not one bit scared.)

So, home I go.

*

Alice Clifford waits me. Soon she'll die
in the Greenwood Nursing Home; my mother's
mother, 79 years & 7 months old.

But first, a nap, til my mother
comes home with the car.

*

The heart stops briefly when someone dies,
a quick pain as you hear the news, & someone passes
from your outside life to inside. Slowly the heart
adjusts to its new weight, & slowly everything
continues, sanely.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*

Living's a pleasure:

I'd like to take the whole trip

despite the possible indignities of growing old,

moving, to die in poverty, among strangers:

those things can't be helped.

*

So, everything now
is just all right. I'm with you.

No more last night.

*

Friday's great

10 o'clock morning sun is shining!

I can hear today's key sounds fading softly

& almost see opening sleep's epic novels.

***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caliban's Filibuster

Paul West

The penultimate day of term was torrid. The sun, which yesterday had remained smoldering behind low waddings of buttercup-colored cloud, burst through, intercepted only here and there by bouffant, deciduous trees whose green was already changing from spring's parakeet to early summer's weathered spinach. Maleth walked slowly from his house door, up Stierzwillingwasserfischbein Street, to the intersection with Lapsex Avenue, his flimsy document case decorated with the relic of two customs stamps (*treal* in red on white, reminding him of Canada, and *Puerto Ric* in black italics on olive green) and with his right hand twirling his black umbrella in a 360-degree circle of fake gaiety.

He felt miserable and piqued. It *would* rain, he told himself, *whoever* said it wouldn't. He knew it in his bones. He knew it especially from those parts where his bones had at one time or another been broken or cracked: three fingers, one ankle, his right temple and right arm. He smiled wanly when he thought of all the disasters he had survived: three car smashes, one airliner that pancaked, many badly caught balls in adolescence, and an empty whisky bottle wielded by one irate, betrayed woman whose face he could no longer call to mind. His sinuses, always a trouble to him, were twitching slightly,

"Caliban's Filibuster" is an excerpt from a novel of the same name.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and that meant rain too. It would rain all right, and he winced at the thought. He didn't like getting wet; he didn't *need* to get wet, like a tree or a golfing green. He was a man in his maturity, walking about his business among cohorts of misguided, undiscerning parrots. His powder was dry; his hair still growing and thick; his mouth-breath fresh with peppermint gum. His nails were filed, ears scoured out, teeth intact and polished, nostrils clean of trailing whiskers, and the spaces, those often ragged spaces, between his toes packed with talc. Most of the dandruff was dead too. I am a walking tribute, he thought as he watched his feet making their military step, to nicety; I am clean.

His hand was just narrow enough to pass between the crook of the umbrella handle as it soared up, poised and swung down behind his shoulder. He told himself it resembled an idling propeller centered in his right hip, warning passers-by that at any moment he might take off and fan gently above the stores (cutting their prices now students were leaving) and the festive medley of cars that jammed the narrow streets, engines idling and spurting, packed or piled high with portmanteaus, grips, golf clubs, radios, canvases, coats on wire hangers, paperbacks strapped or strung together like tiles, hair driers like instruments for the obscenest gynecology of all, umbrellas, meter rules, pieces of shelving, lacrosse sticks, baseball bats, minor tables and even, in the open back of one lilac convertible, a bedraggled Christmas tree. Each car was a hot, shining, metal quadrilateral, open or covered, and jammed (oh yes) with jammy, bouncy, damploined, pulp-lipped, washed-haired, Alice-blue-banded little campus honeys lepidote with tiny eczema or undiagnosed gonorrhea, all sailing glamorously home to cities, penicillin and a few hours of beautifying electrolysis. Already, in their minds, they were resuming contact with the boys who plucked their cherries way back in high school; but, even yet, all he had to do was wave the umbrella, split his face with a banana grin, say his Hi! and they would open the car doors, fuss him into their hot, satin-thighed company and later, when they reached bucolic rutting grounds further along the high-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way, quarrel to be the first to be alone with him in the stationary, closed car.

He slipped his umbrella into his left hand, swooped his right through the hole keys had worn in his pants pocket and made sure his X-front held firm the cocking pistil of his manhood. My God, he said, lapsing into a cherished idiom, thou troublest me yet, stout stamen; thou lump, thou cod, thou bird, thou truncheon fit for triumvirate. Or am *I* provoking *thee*? Down, hysterica passio! Let me be. It's like walking with a glockenspiel rawlplugged into your pants. Here I am, walking along at my precise pace, alongside all these hot-elasticked little flowers, their unwhipped cream curdling as they clutch *Better College Englishes* and *Rhetoric Case Books* against their barely concealed typewriter-ribbon-red zones and pink, whinny-finny apertures, and all I can do is hump my cramped-up, poor old longing bologna before me, like Hadrian carrying his wall or Simon Stylites his stylolite. The pain of it! The weight!

He stopped, removed his hand from his pocket, seized his umbrella at the center of gravity and launched it, javelinlike, at a tree trunk six inches away. The steel tip splintered some bark off and the umbrella fell to the grass. Yes, he thought, I'll sharpen the goddamn thing up one day; *then* it'll stick, and I won't be throwing it at trees. I'll puncture their mammaries and prod their éclairs and pin back their labia! They'll see. One day, by God, I'll make it stick. He had been standing at the intersection a good five minutes, had already missed two chances to cross; but no one had noticed his antic. Everyone was looking ahead to the blue, amber and green lights; those who were waiting went and those who came waited. The student body was on the move, fractionally either advancing or withdrawing its automobile units as the vacation crocodile waited to move on.

He never, of course, noticed the young men. During term, as far as he was concerned, they polished their cars outside the fraternity houses, even in the coldest weather. Out of term they piloted the cars home to have them properly overhauled. Or they ran in T-shirts, regardless of weather, to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strengthen their legs for the gas pedals of the future. Or they floated Frisbees to one another across the lawns and over the snow. They threw balls; in summer, small, inconspicuous ones that plopped into the catcher's glove like soft chestnuts into firm mouths; in winter, something like a true *cojón*, oblate and prettily stitched where the spermatic cord had been cut from the father elephant. He always disliked young men, students especially, and he hated them most of all when, at night, 11:25 on four weekdays and Sundays, 12:55 on Fridays and Saturdays, they revved their sports cars grandly at the girls' dorms, dropped off their dates in hastily reassembled clothes and then zoomed into the night past him, floating the used soap- or salmon-colored safes behind them like exuviae. Once, during winter, he had received one of these flimsy ammoniac flags across his mouth; the night wind had brought it in a low, whipping curve straight from the side-window of a Buick. He saw it coming, rejected the improper idea that it might strike him, then thought better and dodged, only to find it, as he crouched in a kind of nun's or spinster's fear, ruffling upon him. It poised there, a gag held by the wind, until he snatched at it and peeled it away in disgust. He did not hear the laughter from the receding car or see the heads twisted back, jubilantly opening and shutting their mouths. *Yes*, he shouted after the car, *I'll fix you*; *I'll show you one day. Dirty little mothers!* He made a harsh, savage, dry noise with his lower throat and ground the sheath into the gutter with his shoe. It had been used, all right, he could tell. Crud them, crud them all, was all he said.

Later he cheered up, remembering that after the first menopause there is no other. A few days later he had worked up the unsavory episode into a minor *liebeslied* he chanted during his evening of pre-midnight walks while checking on the love life of co-eds and eds. There he walked, slowing his gait at the line-ends and occasionally adding a new line or two. The loneliest of forty-year-old lechers, he populated the sexless dark with earthy, spittle-thick lyrics:

They'd rodger me, they'd rodger you
They'd use aluminum for safes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He usually lifted his head back at this juncture and took a deep breath. Sometimes the lines came out soundingly, sometimes in a whisper:

They'd rodger through umbrellas too,
Except the fabric chafes!

Then, being a man of habit and routine, he would circumvent the Dempster-Dumpster which, he always persuaded himself, was full of sophomoric fetuses putrefying because they were stuck to the sides of the metal box, and, quietly giggling, took his nightly private joy: to wit a gentle, gratifying making of water into the lap of one of the founders, Pythagoras D. Malchios, who sat in green stone at the mouth of the Mall, his arms folded too high to ward off P. D. Maleth's custom-made, uphill Niagara. Steam rose to the masonic, gown-covered collarbone before merging into the night and leaving a bitter aroma at head level. He thought of Urim and Thummin, traditionally found on the breastplates of the high priests of Israel, and translated them into Uric and Tummy, traditionally in his own demented cosmography to be found, the one steaming, the other coated with a fast thin carapace of noxious ice, on the effigy of P. H. Malchios who had presented the Diversity with a cozy, palatial library in Open-Plan Planning on condition that the building has no basement and in 1959 had founded the second Chair in Cryogenics. Gifts, said P.D., who disappeared into the Aegean Sea, should be useful. Fundamentally Maleth agreed and put Malchios' cold lap to his own picric purpose. The day was yet to come when he would be seen and reported, although by then—principally on account of his herd—it would be too late, as the following index of items, culled from his lecture notes on Elizabethan drama, might prove.

ITEM (Intemperate Tamponing Except Manual):

1. Ella Lou May Forsey, one of fourteen, at mid-afternoon in the back row of the Capitol Theatre during a pro-Arab movie called *Introitus*. One way. ITEM:

2. The darker-haired of the Boxey twins, beneath a fishing stage, during rain, at Clam Dam. Two ways. Caught chill. ITEM:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

3. Molly Cooke of Hangnail Hall, in bracken; result of chance encounter while airing camera. The only one who afterward smoothed and dusted skirt, half-curtsied and said, *Thank you, sir.* One way. ITEM:

4. Mrs. Teague's fourth maid, in the cupboard under the stairs during a blizzard. Reek of furniture polish, turpentine and moth balls. Four ways in three hours, while Mrs. T. out shopping for lamb chops. Cramp in sternum. ITEM:

5. Mrs. Teague during next blizzard, in garage while Teague in Alaska or somewhere cold purchasing ore rights. Two ways. ITEM:

6. Millicent Rosalie Duprong, third-year student in education, in alley between Power Plant and Admin Building. After midnight. One way, standing up. ITEM:

7. Mitzi Miffin in rowboat in middle of Clatch's Estuary. Much distraction: mosquitoes. Two ways. Spotted by unarmed weather helicopter. ITEM:

8. Rose Fitch, professional, in five-dollar room under a framed HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS. One way. ITEM:

9. Zoe Price at foot of firetower on gusty May day. Observed by four construction engineers in yellow tin hats. Hasty withdrawal and departure, she with nun's face, he with aloof professional scowl. Halfway, interruptus. ITEM:

10. Mlles. Forsey (six times), Boxey blonde (lost count), fourth maid (eleven), fifth maid (twenty-five), Duprong (once), Muffin (seven), and Price (142) in that order, not forgetting Mme. Teague every blizzard when Teague buying ore rights on inspecting mines. ITEM:

11. But also, shameful to relate, three rolled-up round steaks, one Toothsoft Loaf scooped out and customized with Vaseline, one firm head of lettuce (similarly modified), a new two-pound can of shortening, Baby Mae (thirty-five dollars from *Stud* magazine, inflatable and life-size), and even one of Hussey's cows (in shed) during lambent summer day after two hour's lazy perusal of the sky from an unharvested field with the aid of rickety milking stool and nosebag of feed cake. After use of a wet soapy udder cloth. This clad, and incomplete (cow restive, unwisely having chosen one off-color

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that day. Only just escaping the arrival of vet. Same cow one of two killed by auto several days later? Certainly not suicide.)

So he has lived on in masochistic quietness in his house among the oaks on the edge of the campus, graying and losing touch with his former colleagues, the Faculty Club, the Inter-Departmental Botany Club, the Humanities Raccoon-Hunting Chapter, the Vigny Circle, the Wordsworth Circle, the Swift Ellipse, the Spinoza Rhomboid, the Deutscher Verein and all the other Vereins (Afrikaander Verein, Laplander Verein and Islamer Verein), the Orchid Foundation, and even the local branch of the Stern Gang which hired him to function among them as if he were a British spy, just for the excitement and stimulus the masquerade would provide them.

One day he *knew* he had had enough. It was the coincidence that did it. Coincidence of

Noise: outside in the June afternoon the disjointed stammering electric bray of convertibles leaving a wedding; all that cacophony of tin and tympanic membrane, all those roses and carnations and beehives and rings and powdered cheeks flushed with Veuve-Clicquot, and all those silver ties and dark suits and flimsy rape-soliciting dresses, braying, waving, BLAH-BLAH-BLAH, HONK-HONK-HONK, we've done it, they've done it, we're doing it, car upon car raving by. All that, he decides, to muffle up and proclaim the flesh plug for the flesh hole, side by side on the fake leather cushions hot from the sun. He damns them and damns next

The noise and the thump, bumb, thump from behind the house where, in the small apartments adjoining his kitchen (with only a painted-in window between), the engineering students are holding their daily karate match. The floor, the same floor as extends into the apartments (these built by an enterprising previous owner), trembles. In the kitchen cupboard, what sounds like a minor unbreakable plastic plate topples from its leaning position. The ice in the plastic tub on the makeshift bar tinkles into new positions. The tall,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never-lit candles quiver in their squat, silver-plate sockets. A singularly percussive tremor topples a paperbacked copy of *A Hero of Our Time* from its perch on the white-painted indoor lattice (shelf only two inches wide) that used to support creepers. Until he became the new tenant, thanked Mrs. Hathaway for leaving them behind, saw her out for the last time, then ripped them down and burned them in the back garden, thus incurring a fine from the borough. Once again he damns the borough, the weddings, the karate practitioners, as well as the yellow plate (he supposes), the ill-disciplined ice cubes and, for falling down at all, Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov. He has argued with the landlord in vain: the boys, six of them at ten dollars a week, need to let off steam. They have been warned to fight quietly though. So he hopes the extra-loud bump meant at least one accidentally broken neck. He can't go and fight them all; not quietly, at any rate; not at age forty against their approximate one hundred years of young muscle. So damn.

But not them only, not even only the endless parade of grinding, crashing pantechnicons racing up the gentle hill to beat the lights. All day and all through the night they thunder past his picture window, crammed with frozen carcasses, lumber, chairs, massive cylinders of carpeting, brides and grooms linked together beyond the power of surgery, engineering students irrevocably enmeshed in white-hot girders, overfed landlords wedged in chairs they won't have sawn away from their trapped buttocks. He damns the noise which he cannot blot out even with Shostakovich's Fourth at full blast on his Silvertone Compatible Stereo

And the rubbish he eats. Food color and diglyceride emulsifier in the Swiss rolls; gelatin added to the tinned ham; sodium silico aluminate in the salt; methyl silicone in the oil "to preserve freshness"; calcium stearate in the garlic salt to make it "free flowing"; and in the soft drinks everything: citric acid, sodium citrate, saccharine, calcium cyclamate; in the can of soup, lactic acid; in the onion dressing, sodium caseinate, mono- and diglycerides, dextrose, monosodium glutamate, sugar and hydrolized vegetable protein; and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

non-fattening ice cream has sorbitol, cellulose gum, emulsifier, cyclamate calcium—uk, ooch, ughoops! Ca-ca-caca....

Apart from a few paranoidal, paid, female graduate students, who help him with the porno-photographic experiments he conducts in the cellar at the house (where he still keeps the lobster traps he never used), he is—as all say—out of circulation: professorial yet professing nothing, a polymath but uncommunicating, notorious but out of the public eye, a name to conjure with but meek as a rabbit, sex-mad but aching for public sanity, rough in his manners and dress as Caliban, but careful always—with some unknown sitting-down in mind—to apply baby oil to the cheeks of his buttocks, and always the leave-taker, the undeaning dean, the unmeaning meanderer, the frozen salamander, still a member of the Library (they say he haunts the stacks with a razor blade) and, truth told, a card-carrying member of the CFDES (Communist-Fascist-Democratic-Elite Synthesis) which, in return, supplies him monthly with specially imprinted condoms, the idea being to get the message home where it counts. In this propaganda by osmosis he believes; he has even, in the nights, extended the technique to his cherry tree. Without results; but the one thing he has besides lust is patience. So....

Lamentably, all of his pseudonymous medical revelations have a similarly obvious drift, the brilliance of his photo-electronic, technicolor laboratory technique in the cellar back at the Cain Lab (just an ordinary house) being just a front: a technically ingenious pantechnicon for rediscovering the known. Some have even slandered him, alleging that dilatation in the office was all he ever did, hidden with his victim behind a mound of ungraded exercises and hauling the lubricants from a deep drawer at his right hand. But no. The drawer was at his left.

Of course, in spite of his researches and the fact of their not being published and then listed in the university's annual index, his bad name became worse and worse, entailing finally his demotion from Associal Professor to Dean of Posterior Lobotomy, a post which in the full spirit of suffixal extravaganza came to be known as the Profship of Ion. Thus P. D.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maleth could be (never was) called upon to add himself to any department or faculty in order to dignify or consolidate matters otherwise unimposing (in sound, at least). It was a good idea: Literary Criticism would have sounded well as Criticismion and the History of Consonant as Consonantion. But he was never called upon—right up to the time of his banishment, which consisted (consists) of an unbroken series of sabbatical leaves granted on the condition that he would never again darken the door of a lecture theater, seminar room, committee chamber, laboratory or (severe ordinance) the Faculty Men's Room (his parting graffito, devilish as a dung drop, having been an inscrutable combination of muck-fork and owl-eye shapes chiseled into the smooth black plastic of the seat in the first cubicle as you enter.

Currently he is not at home, basking in the sudsy water or making measurements in the cellar. He has left on one of his trips, is moving blindly toward that world he has read about, that city, that sea, that continent, that litoral, that altitude, that lost dream he folded up in the sheets before he sent out his last pillow case of laundry. With men, but not of them, he tours on, vulnerable as cuckoo-spit in a high wind, ever fresh and willing, doomed to a perpetual unearned salary, the conception of lectures never to be delivered, the sound of impertinent wind in his bowels and tinkling glass mobiles in his ears, visiting all the towers in the world, tap-testing them with his little hammer before carving PDM into them, and—always, such is the fate he has willed upon himself—feigning to be dumb, fumbling his way by signs and primitive scribbles on a celluloid eraser tablet, his mind bent beyond repair. If you meet him, stranger, help him by; for neither water tower nor grain elevator will sustain him, but only the quest for the one lost, last word, which ends a sentence without period

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack Collom

10-4-69

scrambled hay
where your marble body
in some littleboy dream
I can almost remember

hello is my laundry ready

a day like pictures
because of the snow
making frames by blotting out a lot

spinatopsis
quello is my quandary queddy

mehr licht
I am almost asleep on the couch
there is plenty of light

because of the snow

Calder Willingham

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sept. 1968

the cherry tree is full of worms
she says, smoking a cigarette
as I drink Pikes Peak

a slice of pineapple "is" "like" a PICTURE of the sun, with hole

they talk about
how Jane talked about
giving 8 puppies away

"what are you afraid about
your face about?"

"you will see how beautiful that wound is"
"like a spring raspberry"

nothing to explain
the colors I face too
slight to indicate
pain, too dark to imitate the sun
the lines we come to
make, the habit of reality

& the red blood 'they' can
surprise the sky with upon exploding
out of that comfortable *human* look
keeps us
on our toes
dancing, the more indications that
it cd happen any moment
the more we like to talk

my cold & fever
realemon, water, orange ashtray

equation: $\frac{\text{me}}{\text{be}} = \frac{\text{clock as big as a house}}{\text{clock}}$

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people look like
clouds, that whole

clear weightless light
hiding essence. this is the luminous
quality of logic

I walked back
alone
in damp morning
lush
twinkly with light
& began to like it

living-room colors
strain apart
as bodies of any 2 people
are confused enough to do

to waltz among, on every day is Sunday
where Sunday is the bright penance
for reality, mon thru sat

the gray cat
so absolute in "coldness"
does her (his) dance
out of pure economy
I take
as a sign of life

the day settles in parentheses

this is the unity
of which I spoke—I take big cup
of coffee no. four
to get a little sick
see "MERRY-GO-ROUND" by accident
contemplate the crescents of scattered cars
edging the back fields, like shells
as if a wave of metal washed over
us, unnoticed, & subsided, leaving the cars

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or the field, of earth
cast them up in
parked curls, on our visual shores
the mailman
walks out from the mental health center
& drives his truck away

"couch", no music
"playing" to cube my moments with
abstraction of somebody else's. no drinking
today, to not let loose
more meaning than the words can bear
the sea or railroad or highway sound
of my family
would disturb should it stop
building the air

there's a situation without light or dark

I piss
& passing the window see in the dazzle of light & grass
a focus of weight, a horse
"Trapper"

too formal to reflect, standing
out on that account. the meaning
of the head hung down
is eating

(Christopher
makes war with Franz, each
lamb & wolf in dazzling alternation
stink of peace an
irrelevant taste, like
olives, for their clean baby
evils)

the vacuum cleaner
fills the air
with the hum of Traudl's quest
the roar of her gray
desire

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(cold scrambled eggs)

I go
piss, eyes flat
with noon

in the balance we may term
"the green meadows"

at last
my character albino

2 weeks ago Christopher said
if a giraffe
jumped on my belly
I would go to the bathroom & puke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anselm Hollo

To Be Born Again

inside my mother
i make a little fist
& then i punch her

★

enter another plane

walk right into it

THE ROARING BEGINS

a few hours later

you stride ashore

"WELCOME TO AMERICA!"

★

"th-there's a l-lot of b-bastards out there!"

—William Carlos Williams

ONE MOMENT PLEASE
TO ADJUST MACHINE

★

2 a.m. in bed

says "come on out"

some one in my head

"you've been forgiven"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harris Schiff

Pure Poison

You are the toy that dies
you are the movie
& the theatre
& the movie star

you are the cow that gives birth
to an unutterable fantasy
you are the jelly
& you are the come blanket

you are busted
you are in trouble
you are the target for the prod

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Scott Cohen

Coke

The difference in the speed of the thought process of a man who has just snorted coke and a man who hasn't is a very strange number which has a cosmic meaning, that is, it enters into the cosmic processes. This number is 27,000.

I was glad to find the Bar-B-Q Book sitting on my desk because sitting on the Bar-B-Q Book was another gram of coke.

Sitting in one of the cafés was a man born without a nose. That part of his face had no trace of there ever having been a nose. There weren't even openings. The man, however, was able to smell through his ears, which he also used for snorting coke.

You never hear the expression "He holds his coke well."

My three favorite Dylan songs: "It Ain't Me, Coke," "Like A Rolling Coke," and "John Wesley Coke."

In the field an ounce of grass costs about 50 cents and an ounce of hash about the same. By the time the grass gets here an ounce costs $10–$15 and an ounce of hash $70. An ounce of coke costs anywhere from $600–$900.

I used to think the greatest pleasure in the world would be a ride around Central Park in a carriage on a crisp night with a bottle of champagne and my best girl. Now I think the greatest pleasure would be a ride around Central Park in a carriage with a bag of coke.

Drugs of the 70's: Heroin and coke.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Code of the West: When you snort, snort to win.

"I couldn't remember your other eye, I puked."
I was under the influence of coke.

A man and his friend were sniffing coke on a mountain during an earthquake. The earthquake was so bad it shook the cars that were parked near the top off the mountain. The man wasn't surprised when his friend got hit in the head by a car.

Everyone knows what a great film "Gone With the Coke" was.

"I reached in my pocket but my pocket said 'No more coke.'"
That's what the man in the song says.

That man had some and two hours later, I had some.
Then Ann came home and we both had some. The next day no one had any. Then I had some and there was only a tiny bit left. Actually there was a lot left and we all had some.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

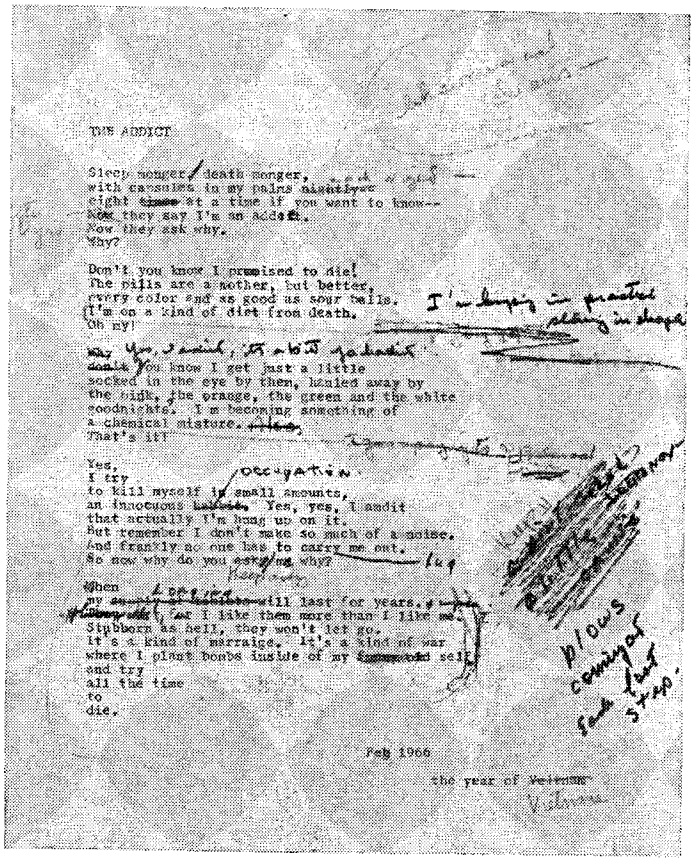
Good Sam

Good Sam is a dealer.
Good Sam is one of the biggest dealers in the world.
Good Sam deals high quality grass and hash.
Good Sam gives away free LSD around the world.
Good Sam's LSD is always pure.
Good Sam has golden blond hair which he wears in a ponytail.
Good Sam puts $5 on a pound and deals thousands of pounds at a time.
When Timothy Leary talks about the Brotherhood Of Dealers he is talking about Good Sam.
Good Sam wears jewelry.
Good Sam deals to 134 smaller dealers in New York City alone.
Good Sam never does a deal of less than a hundred pounds.
Good Sam never touches his dope himself.
Good Sam has never been burned.
The FBI has offered 50,000 dollars to anyone who could set Good Sam up for a bust.
Good Sam is not his real name.
Good Sam never does a deal without first consulting his astrologer.
Good Sam is high.
Good Sam takes attention away from anyone he is with.
When Good Sam goes through customs, customs officials immediately pick up on Good Sam and the person holding the stash goes through unsearched.
Good Sam is international.
If Good Sam had to live in one city he would live in New York because New York is the only twentieth century city.
Good Sam is bisexual.
Good Sam thinks the revolution will be won only after the consciousness of the world has changed.
Good Sam thinks it is revolutionary to turn people on to good LSD.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Good Sam never calls LSD acid.
Good Sam likes cocaine but thinks it is bad karma to deal.
When Good Sam goes to press parties for famous rock groups he sits at a table reserved specially for dope dealers.
Good Sam doesn't own a car.
Good Sam says Marxism-Leninism is like an old poem.
Good Sam says there should be little difference between a man's politics and his life-style.
Good Sam hopes never to do in the seventies what he did in the sixties.
Good Sam never plans to retire. Never.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE ADDICT

Sleep monger, death monger,
with capsules in my palms assuring
eight [illegible] at a time if you want to know--
Now they say I'm an addict.
Now they ask why.
Why?

Don't you know I promised to die!
The pills are a mother, but better,
every color and as good as sour balls.
I'm on a kind of diet from death.
Oh my!

Why You, I said, it's now got to
don't You know I get just a little
sucked in the eye by them, hauled away by
the pink, the orange, the green and the white
goodnights. I'm becoming something of
a chemical mixture.
That's it!

Yes,
I try
to kill myself in small amounts,
an innocuous [illegible]. Yes, yes, I admit
that actually I'm hung up on it.
But remember I don't make so much of a noise.
And frankly no one has to carry me out.
So now why do you ask me why?

When
my [illegible] will last for years.
[illegible], or I like them more than I like me.
Stubborn as hell, they won't let go.
It's a kind of marriage. It's a kind of war
where I plant bombs inside of my [illegible]
and try
all the time
to
die.

Feb 1966

the year of Vietnam

Anne Sexton manuscript

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Art of Poetry XV

Anne Sexton

Pulitzer prize-winning poet Anne Sexton discovered her craft late in life. Born in 1928, she married and bore two children before she settled down to serious writing. With the publication of each book, grants and awards followed. To Bedlam and Part Way Back *(1960) led to admittance to Radcliffe's Institute for Independent Study (1961-63);* All My Pretty Ones *(1962) brought her the first traveling fellowship offered by the American Academy of*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arts and Letters (1963-64), a Ford Foundation grant in playwriting (1964-65), and the first literary magazine travel grant from The Congress for Cultural Freedom (1965). That same year, her Selected Poems *appeared in England, and she was elected Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. Her third book,* Live or Die *(1966), won the 1967 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the Shelley Award from the Poetry Society of America. A fourth book,* Love Poems, *was published in 1969.*

The interview took place over three days in the middle of August, 1968. When asked about dates of publications or other events, Anne Sexton kept saying, "Let me think, I want this to be accurate." And she'd use the births of her children as reference dates to chronicle the event in question. Sometimes her distinctions between real and imagined life blurred, as in scenes from Pirandello. Often, her answers sounded like incantations, repetitious chants which if pared down would lose something of their implications, and so, for the most part, they are preserved in their entirety. Even when replying from written notes, she read with all the inflections and intonations of—as she describes her readings—"an actress in her own autobiographical play."

INTERVIEWER

You were almost thirty before you began writing poetry. Why?

SEXTON

Until I was twenty-eight I had a kind of buried self who didn't know she could do anything but make white sauce and diaper babies. I didn't know I had any creative depths. I was a victim of the American Dream, the bourgeois, middle-class dream. All I wanted was a little piece of life, to be married, to have children. I thought the nightmares, the visions, the demons would go away if there was enough love to put them down. I was trying my damnedest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted of me. But one can't build little white picket fences to keep nightmares out. The surface cracked when I was about twenty-eight. I had a psychotic break and tried to kill myself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTERVIEWER

And you began to write after the nervous breakdown?

SEXTON

It isn't quite as simple as all that. I said to my doctor at the beginning, "I'm no good; I can't do anything; I'm dumb." He suggested I try educating myself by listening to Boston's educational TV station. He said I had a perfectly good mind. As a matter of fact, after he gave me a Rorschach test, he said I had creative talent that I wasn't using. I protested, but I followed his suggestion. One night I saw I. A. Richards on educational television reading a sonnet and explaining its form. I thought to myself, "I could do that, maybe; I could try." So I sat down and wrote a sonnet. The next day I wrote another one, and so forth. My doctor encouraged me to write more. "Don't kill yourself," he said. "Your poems might mean something to someone else someday." That gave me a feeling of purpose, a little cause, something to *do* with my life, no matter how rotten I was.

INTERVIEWER

Hadn't you written limericks before that?

SEXTON

I did write some light verse—for birthdays, for anniversaries, sometimes thank-you notes for weekends. Long before, I wrote some serious stuff in high school; however, I hadn't been exposed to any of the major poets, not even the minor ones. No one taught poetry at that school. I read nothing but Sara Teasdale. I might have read other poets but my mother said as I graduated from high school that I had plagiarized Sara Teasdale. Something about that statement of hers...I had been writing a poem a day for three months, but when she said that, I stopped.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't anyone encourage you?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

It wouldn't have mattered. My mother was top billing in our house.

INTERVIEWER

In the beginning, what was the relationship between your poetry and your therapy?

SEXTON

Sometimes, my doctors tell me that I understand something in a poem that I haven't integrated into my life. In fact, I may be concealing it from myself, while I was revealing it to the readers. The poetry is often more advanced, in terms of my unconscious, than I am. Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious. The unconscious is there to feed it little images, little symbols, the answers, the insights I know not of. In therapy, one seeks to hide sometimes. I'll give you a rather intimate example of this. About three or four years ago my analyst asked me what I thought of my parents having intercourse when I was young. I couldn't talk. I knew there was suddenly a poem there, and I selfishly guarded it from him. Two days later, I had a poem, entitled, "In the Beach House," which describes overhearing the primal scene. In it I say, "Inside my prison of pine and bedspring,/over my window sill, under my knob,/it is plain they are at/the royal strapping." The point of this little story is the image, "the royal strapping." My analyst was quite impressed with that image and so was I, although I don't remember going any further with it then. About three weeks ago, he said to me, "Were you ever beaten as a child?" I told him that I had been, when I was about nine. I had torn up a five-dollar bill that my father gave to my sister; my father took me into his bedroom, laid me down on his bed, pulled off my pants and beat me with a riding crop. As I related this to my doctor, he said, "See, that was quite a royal strapping," thus revealing to me, by way of my own image, the intensity of that moment, the sexuality of that beating, the little masochistic seizure—it's so classic, it's almost corny. Perhaps it's too intimate an example, but then both poetry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and therapy are intimate.

INTERVIEWER

Are your poems still closely connected to your therapy as in the past?

SEXTON

No. The subject of therapy was an early theme—the process itself as in "Said the Poet to the Analyst," the people of my past, admitting what my parents were really like, the whole Gothic New England story. I've had about eight doctors, but only two that count. I've written a poem for each of the two —"You, Doctor Martin" and "Cripples and Other Stories." And that will do. Those poems are about the two men as well as the strange process. One can say that my new poems, the love poems, come about as a result of new attitudes, an awareness of the possibly good as well as the possibly rotten. Inherent in the process is a rebirth of a sense of self, each time stripping away a dead self.

INTERVIEWER

Some critics admire your ability to write about the terror of childhood guilts, parental deaths, breakdowns, suicides. Do you feel that writing about the dark parts of the human psyche takes a special act of courage?

SEXTON

Of course, but I'm tired of explaining it. It seems to be self-evident. There are warnings all along the way. "Go—children —slow." "It's dangerous in there." The appalling horror that awaits you in the answer.

INTERVIEWER

People speak of you as a primitive. Was it so natural for you to dig so deeply into the painful experiences of your life?

SEXTON

There was a part of me that was horrified, but the gutsy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

part of me drove on. Still, part of me was appalled by what I was doing. On the one hand I was digging up shit, with the other hand, I was covering it with sand. Nevertheless, I went on ahead. I didn't know any better. Sometimes, I felt like a reporter researching himself. Yes, it took a certain courage, but as a writer one has to take the chance on being a fool...yes, to be a fool, that perhaps requires the greatest courage.

INTERVIEWER

Once you began writing, did you attend any formal classes to bone up on technique?

SEXTON

After I'd been writing about three months, I dared to go into the poetry class at the Boston Center for Adult Education taught by John Holmes. I started in the middle of the term, very shy, writing very bad poems, solemnly handing them in for the eighteen others in the class to hear. The most important aspect of that class was that I felt I belonged somewhere. When I first got sick and became a displaced person, I thought I was quite alone, but when I went into the mental hospital, I found I wasn't, that there were other people like me. It made me feel better—more real, sane. I felt, "These are my people." Well, at the John Holmes class that I attended for two years, I found I belonged to the poets, that I was *real* there, and I had another, "These are my people." I met Maxine Kumin, the poet and novelist, at that class. She is my closest friend. She is part superego, part sister, as well as pal of my desk. It's strange because we're quite different. She is reserved, while I tend to be flamboyant. She is an intellectual, and I seem to be a primitive. That is true about our poetry as well.

INTERVIEWER

You once told me, "I call Maxine Kumin every other line." Is that a slight exaggeration?

SEXTON

Yes. But often, I call her draft by draft. However, a lot of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poems I did without her. The year I was writing my first book, I didn't know her well enough to call that often. Later, when she didn't approve of such poems as "Flee on Your Donkey"—that one took four years to complete—I was on my own. Yet once, she totally saved a poem, "Cripples and other Stories."

INTERVIEWER

In the early days, how did your relatives react to the jangling of family skeletons?

SEXTON

I tried not to show my relatives any of the poems. I do know that my mother snuck into my desk one time and read "The Double Image" before it was printed. She told me just befores he died that she liked the poem, and that saved me from some added guilt. My husband liked that poem, too. Ordinarily, if I show him a poem, something I try not to do, he says, "I don't think that's too hotsy-totsy," which puts me off. I try not to do it too often. My in-laws don't approve of the poems at all. My children do—with a little pain, they do.

INTERVIEWER

In your poems, several family skeletons come out of the camphor balls—your father's alcoholic tendencies, your mother's inability to deal with your suicide attempt, your great-aunt in a strait jacket. Is there any rule you follow as to which skeletons you reveal and which you don't?

SEXTON

I don't reveal skeletons that would hurt anyone. They may hurt the dead, but the dead belong to me. Only once in a while do they talk back. For instance, I don't write about my husband or his family, although there are some amazing stories there.

INTERVIEWER

How about Holmes or the poets in your class, what did they say?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

During the years of that class, John Holmes saw me as something evil and warned Maxine to stay away from me. He told me I shouldn't write such personal poems about the madhouse. He said, "That isn't a fit subject for poetry." I knew no one who thought it was; even my doctor clammed up at that time. I was on my own. I tried to mind them. I tried to write the way the others, especially Maxine, wrote, but it didn't work. I always ended up sounding like myself.

INTERVIEWER

You have said, "If anything influenced me, it was W. D. Snodgrass' "Heart's Needle." Would you comment on that?

SEXTON

If he had the courage, then I had the courage. That poem about losing his daughter brought me to face some of the facts about my own life. I had lost a daughter, lost her because I was too sick to keep her. After I read the poem, "Heart's Needle," I ran up to my mother-in-law's house and brought my daughter home. That's what a poem should do—move people to action. True, I didn't keep my daughter at the time —I wasn't ready. But I was beginning to be ready. I wrote a disguised poem about it, "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward." The pain of the loss...

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever meet Snodgrass?

SEXTON

Yes. I'd read "Heart's Needle" in *The New Poets of England and America*. I'd written about three quarters of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* at the time, and I made a pilgrimage to Antioch Writer's Conference to meet and to learn from Snodgrass. He was a surprising person, surprisingly humble. He encouraged me, he liked what I was doing. He was the first established poet to like my work, and so I was driven to write harder and to allow myself, to dare my-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self to tell the whole story. He also suggested that I study with Robert Lowell. So I sent Mr. Lowell some of my poems and asked if he would take me into the class. By then I'd had poems published in *The New Yorker* and around a bit. At any rate, the poems seemed good enough for Lowell and I joined the class.

INTERVIEWER

Which poems did you submit to Lowell?

SEXTON

As far as I can remember, the poems about madness—"You, Doctor Martin," "Music Swims Back to Me"...about ten or fifteen poems from the book.

INTERVIEWER

Was this before or after Lowell published *Life Studies*?

SEXTON

Before. I sent him the poems in the summer; the following spring *Life Studies* came out. Everyone says I was influenced by Robert Lowell's revelation of madness in that book, but I was writing *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, the story of my madness, before *Life Studies* was published. I showed my poems to Mr. Lowell as he was working on his book. Perhaps I even influenced him. I have never asked him. But stranger things have happened.

INTERVIEWER

And when was your first book, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, published?

SEXTON

It was accepted that January; it wasn't published for a year and a half after that, I think.

INTERVIEWER

Where was Lowell teaching then?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

The class met at Boston University on Tuesdays from two to four in a dismal room. It consisted of some twenty students. Seventeen graduates, two other housewives who were graduates or something, and a boy who had snuck over from M.I.T. I was the only one in that room who hadn't read *Lord Weary's Castle*.

INTERVIEWER

And Lowell, how did he strike you?

SEXTON

He was formal in a rather awkward New England sense. His voice was soft and slow as he read the students' poems. At first I felt the impatient desire to interrupt his slow, line by line readings. He would read the first line, stop, and then discuss it at length. I wanted to go through the whole poem quickly and then go back. I couldn't see any merit in dragging through it until you almost hated the damned thing, even your own poems, especially your own. At that point, I wrote to Snodgrass about my impatience, and his reply went this way, "Frankly, I used to nod my head at his every statement, and he taught me more than a whole gang of scholars could." So I kept my mouth shut, and Snodgrass was right. Robert Lowell's method of teaching is intuitive and open. After he had read a student's poem, he would read another evoked by it. Comparison was often painful. He worked with a cold chisel, with no more mercy than a dentist. He got out the decay, but if he was never kind to the poem, he was kind to the poet.

INTERVIEWER

Did you consult Robert Lowell on your manuscript of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* before you submitted it to a publisher?

SEXTON

Yes. I gave him a manuscript to see if he thought it was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

book. He was enthusiastic on the whole, but suggested that I throw out about half of it and write another fifteen or so poems that were better. He pointed out the weak ones, and I nodded and took them out. It sounds simple to say that I merely, as he once said, "jumped the hurdles that he had put up," but it makes a difference who puts up the hurdles. He defined the course, and acted as though, good race horse that I was, I would just naturally run it.

INTERVIEWER

Ultimately, what can a teacher give a writer in a creative-writing class?

SEXTON

Courage, of course. That's the most important ingredient. Then, in a rather plain way, Lowell helped me to distrust the easy musical phrase and to look for the frankness of ordinary speech. Lowell is never impressed with a display of images or sounds—those things that a poet is born with anyhow. If you have enough natural imagery, he can show you how to chain it in. He didn't teach me what to put into a poem, but what to leave out. What he taught me was taste—perhaps that's the only thing a poet can be taught.

INTERVIEWER

Sylvia Plath was a member of Lowell's class also, wasn't she?

SEXTON

Yes. She and George Starbuck heard that I was auditing Lowell's class. They kind of joined me there for the second term. After the class, we would pile in the front seat of my old Ford and I would drive quickly through the traffic to the Ritz. I would always park illegally in a "Loading Only Zone," telling them gaily, "It's O.K., we're only going to get loaded." Off we'd go, each on George's arm, into the Ritz to drink three or four martinis. George even has a line about this in his first book of poems, *Bone Thoughts*. After the Ritz, we would spend our last pennies at the Waldorf Cafe-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teria—a dinner for seventy cents—George was in no hurry. He was separated from his wife; Sylvia's Ted [Hughes] was busy with his own work, and I had to stay in the city for a seven p.m. appointment with my psychiatrist...a funny three.

INTERVIEWER

In Sylvia Plath's last book, written just before her suicide, she was submerged by the theme of death, as you are in your book, *Live or Die*. Did you ever get around to talking about death or your suicides at the Ritz?

SEXTON

Often, very often. Sylvia and I would talk at length about our first suicide, in detail and in depth—between the free potato chips. Suicide is, after all, the opposite of the poem. Sylvia and I often talked opposites. We talked death with burned-up intensity, both of us drawn to it like moths to an electric light bulb, sucking on it. She told the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail, and her description in *The Bell Jar* is just that same story. It is a wonder we didn't depress George with our egocentricity; instead, I think, we three were stimulated by it—even George—as if death made each of us a little more real at the moment.

INTERVIEWER

In a BBC interview, Sylvia Plath said, "I've been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came with, say, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*... This intense breakthrough into very serious, very personal emotional experience, which I feel has been partly taboo...I think particularly of the poetess Anne Sexton, who writes also about her experiences as a mother; as a mother who's had a nervous breakdown, as an extremely emotional and feeling young woman. And her poems are wonderfully craftsmanlike poems, and yet they have a kind of emotional psychological depth, which I think is something perhaps quite new and exciting." Do you agree that you influenced her?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

Maybe. I did give her a sort of daring, but that's all she should have said. I remember writing to Sylvia in England after her first book, *The Colossus*, came out and saying something like, "If you're not careful, Sylvia, you will out-Roethke Roethke." She replied that I had guessed accurately. But maybe she buried her so-called influences deeper than that, deeper than any one of us would think to look, and if she did, I say, "Good luck to her!" Her poems do their own work. I don't need to sniff them for distant relatives: I'm against it.

INTERVIEWER

Did Sylvia Plath influence your writing?

SEXTON

Her first book didn't interest me at all. I was doing my own thing. But after her death, with the appearance of *Ariel*, I think I was influenced and I don't mind saying it. In a special sort of way, it was daring again. She had dared to do something quite different. She had dared to write hate poems, the one thing I had never dared to write. I'd always been afraid, even in my life, to express anger. I think the poem, Cripples and Other Stories," is evidence of a hate poem somehow, though no one could ever write a poem to compare to her "Daddy." There was a kind of insolence in them, saying, "Daddy, you bastard, I'm through." I think the poem, "The Addict," has some of her speech rhythms in it. She had very open speech rhythms, something that I didn't always have.

INTERVIEWER

You have said, "I think the second book lacks some of the impact and honesty of the first, which I wrote when I was so raw that I didn't know any better." Would you describe your development from the second book to the third and from your third to the fourth?

SEXTON

Well, in the first book, I was giving the experience of mad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness; in the second book, the causes of madness; and in the third book, finally, I find that I was deciding whether to live or to die. In the third I was daring to be a fool again—raw, "uncooked," as Lowell calls it, with a little camouflage. In the fourth book, I not only have lived, come on to the scene, but loved, that sometime miracle.

INTERVIEWER

What would you say about the technical development from book to book?

SEXTON

In *Bedlam*, I used very tight form in most cases, feeling that I could express myself better. I take a kind of pleasure, even now, but more especially in *Bedlam*, in forming a stanza, a verse, making it an entity, and then coming to a little conclusion at the end of it, of a little shock, a little double rhyme shock. In my second book, *All My Pretty Ones*, I loosened up and in the last section didn't use any form at all. I found myself to be surprisingly free without the form which had worked as a kind of superego for me. The third book I used less form. In *Love Poems*, I had one long poem, eighteen sections, that is in form and I enjoyed doing it in that way. With the exception of that and a few other poems, all of the book is in free verse, and I feel at this point comfortable to use either, depending on what the poem requires.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any particular subject which you'd rather deal with in form than in free verse?

SEXTON

Probably madness. I've noticed that Robert Lowell felt freer to write about madness in free verse, whereas it was the opposite for me. Only after I had set up large structures that were almost impossible to deal with did I think I was free to allow myself to express what had really happened. However in *Live or Die*, I wrote "Flee on Your Donkey"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without that form and found that I could do it just as easily in free verse. That's perhaps something to do with my development as a human being and understanding of myself, besides as a poet.

INTERVIEWER

In *Live or Die*, the whole book has a marvelous structured tension—simply by the sequence of the poems which pits the wish to live against the death instinct. Did you plan the book this way? Lois Ames speaks of you as wishing to write more "live" poems because the "die" poems outnumbered them.

SEXTON

I didn't plan the book any way. In January of 1962, I started collecting new poems the way you do when a book is over. I didn't know where they would go or that they would go anywhere, even into a book. Then at some point, as I was collecting these poems, I was rereading *Henderson the Rain King* by Saul Bellow. I had met Saul Bellow at a cocktail party about a year before and I had been carrying *Henderson the Rain King* around in my suitcase everywhere I traveled. Suddenly there I was meeting Saul Bellow, and I was overenthusiastic. I said, "Oh, oh, you're Saul Bellow, I've wanted to meet you," and he ran from the room. Very afraid. I was quite ashamed of my exuberance and then sometime, a year later, reading *Henderson the Rain King* over again, at three in the morning, I wrote Saul Bellow a fan letter about Henderson, saying that he was a monster of despair, that I understood his position because Henderson was the one who had ruined life, who had blown up the frogs, made a mess out of everything. I drove to the mail box then and there! The next morning I wrote him a letter of apology.

Saul Bellow wrote me back on the back of a manuscript. He said to me, "Luckily, I have a message to you from the book I am writing [which was *Herzog*]. I have both your letters—the good one which was written that night at three A.M. and then the contrite one, the next day. One's best

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

things are always followed by apoleptic, apologetic seizure. Monster of despair could be *Henderson's* subtitle." The message that he had encircled went this way, "With one long breath caught and held in his chest, he fought his sadness over his solitary life. Don't cry you idiot, live or die, but don't poison everything." And in circling that and in sending it to me, Saul Bellow had given me a message about my whole life. That I didn't want to poison the world, that I didn't want to be the killer; I wanted to be the one who gave birth, who encouraged things to grow and to flower, not the poisoner. So I stuck that message up over my desk and it was a kind of hidden message. You don't know what these messages mean to you, yet you stick them up over your desk or remember them or write them down and put them in your wallet. One day I was reading a quote from Rimbaud that said, "Anne, Anne, flee on your donkey," and I typed it out because it had my name in it and because I wanted to flee. I put it in my wallet, went to see my doctor, and at that point was committed to a hospital for about the seventh or eighth time. In the hospital, I started to write the poem, "Flee on Your Donkey," as though the message had come to me at just the right moment. Well, this was true with Bellow's quote from his book. I kept it over my desk and when I went to Europe, I pasted it in the front of my manuscript. I kept it there as a quotation with which to preface my book. It must have just hit me one day that *Live or Die* was a damn good title for the book I was working on. And that's what it was all about, what all those poems were about. You say there's a tension there and a structure, but it was an unconscious tension and an unconscious structure that I didn't know was going on when I was doing it.

INTERVIEWER

Once you knew the title of the book, did you count up the "live" poems and count up the "die" poems and then write any more poems because of an imbalance?

SEXTON

No, no, that's far too rigid. You can't write a poem because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an imbalance. After that I wrote "Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman." Then I wrote a play, then "A Little Uncomplicated Hymn" and other poems. Some were negative and some were positive. At this time I knew that I was trying to get a book together. I had more than enough for a book, but I knew I hadn't written out the live or die question. I hadn't written the poem "Live." This was bothering me because it wasn't coming to me. Instead of that, "Cripples and Other Stories" and "The Addict" were appearing, and I knew that I wasn't finishing the book, that I hadn't come to the cycle, I hadn't given a reason. There's nothing I could do about this and then suddenly, our dog was pregnant. I was supposed to kill all the puppies when they came; instead, I let them live and I realized that if I let *them* live, that I could let *me* live, too, that after all I wasn't a killer, that the poison just didn't take.

INTERVIEWER

Although you received a European traveling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, there are, to date, very few poems published about your European experience. Why?

SEXTON

First of all poems aren't postcards to send home. Secondly I went to Europe with a purpose as well as with a grant. My great-aunt, who was really my best childhood friend, had sent letters home from Europe the three years that she lived there. I had written about this in a poem called "Some Foreign Letters." I had her letters with me as I left for Europe and I was going to walk her walks, and go to her places, live her life over again, and write letters back to her. The two poems that I did write about Europe mention the letters. In "Crossing the Atlantic," I mention that I have read my grandmother's letters, and my mother's letters. I had swallowed their words like Dickens, thinking of Dickens' journals in America. The second poem, "Walking in Paris," was written about my great-aunt, how she used to walk fourteen or fifteen miles a day in Paris, and I call her Nana. Some critics have thought I meant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zola's Nana, but I didn't any more than I meant the Nana in Peter Pan. However the letters were stolen from my car in Belgium. When I lost the letters in Brussels, that was the end of that kind of poem that I had gone over there to write.

INTERVIEWER

You were to go abroad for a year, but you only stayed two months. Do you want to comment on that?

SEXTON

Two and a half months. I got sick over there; I lost my sense of self. I had, as my psychiatrist said, "a leaky ego" and I had to come home. I was in the hospital for a while and then I returned to my normal life. I had to come home because I need my husband and my therapist and my children to tell me who I am. I remember, I was talking with Elizabeth Hardwick on the phone and saying, "Oh, I feel so guilty. I couldn't get along without my husband. It's a terrible thing, really, a modern woman should be able to do it." Although I may be misquoting her, I may have remembered it the way I needed to hear it, she said to me, "If I were in Paris without my husband, I'd hide in a hotel room all day." And I said, "Well, think of Mary McCarthy." And Elizabeth Hardwick said, "Mary McCarthy, she's never been without a man for a day in her life."

INTERVIEWER

From 1964 to 1965, you held a Ford Foundation Grant in playwriting and worked at Boston's Charles Street Playhouse. How did you feel writing something that had to be staged?

SEXTON

I felt great! I used to pace up and down the living room shouting out the lines, and what do they call it... for walking around the stage... *blocking* out the play as I would go along.

INTERVIEWER

Was the play [*Mercy Street*] ever performed?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

There were little working performances at the Charles Playhouse when we had time. It was pretty busy there. Now and then they would play out a scene for me, and then I would rewrite it and send it in to the director special delivery. He would call me up the next morning and say, "It's not right," and then I would work on it again, send it to him that evening, and then the next morning, he'd call, and so on it went. I found that I had one whole character in the play who was unnecessary because, as they acted it, the director had that person be quiet and say nothing. I realized that that dialogue was totally unnecessary, so I cut out that character.

INTERVIEWER

Did you find that the themes in your poetry overlapped into your play? Was your play an extension of your poetry?

SEXTON

Yes. Completely. The play was about a girl shuffling between her psychiatrist and a priest. It was the priest I cut out, realizing that she really wasn't having a dialogue with him at all. The play was about all the subjects that my poems are about—my mother, my great-aunt, my father, and the girl who wants to kill herself. A little bit about her husband, but not much. The play is really a morality play. The second act takes place after death.

INTERVIEWER

Many of your poems are dramatic narratives. Because you're accustomed to handling a plot, was it easy for you to switch from verse to scene writing?

SEXTON

I don't see the difference. In both cases, the character is confronting himself and his destiny. I didn't know I was writing scenes; I thought I was writing about people. In another con-

Editor's Note: *Mercy Street* was eventually produced at New York's American Place Theater in 1969.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

text—helping Maxine Kumin with her novel—I gave her a bit of advice. I told her, "Fuck structure and grab your characters by the time balls." Each one of us sits in our time; we're born, live and die. She was thinking this and that and I was telling her to get inside her characters' lives—which she finally did.

INTERVIEWER

What were your feelings when you received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for *Live Or Die* in 1967?

SEXTON

Of course, I was delighted. It had been a bad time for me. I had a broken hip and I was just starting to get well, still crippled, but functioning a little bit. After I received the prize, it gave me added incentive to write more. In the months following, I managed to write a poem, "Eighteen Days Without You," in fourteen days—an eighteen section poem. I was inspired by the recognition that the Pulitzer gave me, even though I was aware that it didn't mean all that much. After all, they have to give a Pulitzer Prize every year and I was just one in a long line.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write a spate of poems at one time or are you disciplined by a writing schedule?

SEXTON

Well, I'm very dissatisfied with the amount I write. My first book—although it took three years to complete—was really written in one year. Sometimes ten poems were written in two weeks. When I was going at that rate, I found that I could really work well. Now I tend to become dissatisfied with the fact that I write poems so slowly, that they come to me so slowly. When they come, I write them; when they don't come, I don't. There's certainly no disciplined writing schedule, except for the fact that when a poem comes a person must be disciplined and ready flexing his muscles. That is they burst

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forth and you must put everything else aside. Ideally it doesn't matter what it is, unless your husband has double pneumonia or the child breaks his leg. Otherwise, you don't tear yourself away from the typewriter until you must sleep.

INTERVIEWER

Do the responsibilities of wife and mother interfere with your writing?

SEXTON

Well, when my children were younger, they interfered all the time. It was just my stubbornness that let me get through with it at all, because here were these young children saying, "Momma, Momma," and there I was getting the images, structuring the poem. Now my children are older and creep around the house saying, "Shh, Mother is writing a poem." But then again, as I was writing the poem, "Eighteen Days Without You"—the last poem in *Love Poems*—my husband said to me, "I can't stand it any longer, you haven't been with me for days." That poem originally was "Twenty-one Days Without You" and it became "Eighteen Days" because he had cut into the inspiration; he demanded my presence back again, into his life, and I couldn't take that much from him.

INTERVIEWER

When writing, what part of the poem is the prickliest part?

SEXTON

Punctuation, sometimes. The punctuating can change the whole meaning, and my life is full of little dots and dashes. Therefore, I have to let the editors help me punctuate. And, probably the rhythm. It's the thing I have to work hardest to get in the beginning—the feeling, the voice of the poem, and how it will come across, how it will feel to the reader, how it feels to me as it comes out. Images are probably the most important part of the poem. First of all, you want to tell a story, but images are what are going to shore it up and get to the heart of the matter—but I don't have to work too hard for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the images—they have to come—if they're not coming, I'm not even writing a poem, it's pointless. So I work hardest to get the rhythm, because each poem should have its own rhythm, its own structure. Each poem has its own life, each one is different.

INTERVIEWER

How do you decide a length of line? Does it have something to do with the way it looks on a page as well as how many beats there are to a line?

SEXTON

How it looks on a page. I don't give a damn about the beats in a line, unless I want them and need them. These are just tricks that you use when you need them. It's a very simple thing to write with rhyme and with rhythmic beat—those things anyone can do nowadays; everyone is quite accomplished at that. The point, the hard thing, is to get the true voice of the poem, to make each poem an individual thing, give it the stamp of your own voice, and at the same time to make it singular.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever find yourself saying, "Oh, yes, I've explored that in another poem," and discarding a poem?

SEXTON

No, because I might want to explore it in a new way... I might have a new realization, a new truth about it. Recently I noticed in "Flee on Your Donkey" that I had used some of the same facts in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, but I hadn't realized them in their total ugliness. I'd hidden from them. This time was really raw and really ugly and it was all involved with my own madness. It was all like a great involuted web, and I presented it the way it really was.

INTERVIEWER

Do you revise a great deal?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

Constantly.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any ritual which gets you set for writing?

SEXTON

I might, if I felt the poem come on, put on a certain record, sometimes the "Bachianas Brasileiras" by Villa-Lobos. I wrote to that for about three or four years. It's my magic tune.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any time of day, any particular mood that is better for writing?

SEXTON

No. Those moments before a poem comes, when the heightened awareness comes over you and you realize a poem is buried there somewhere, you prepare yourself. I run around, you know, kind of skipping around the house, marvelous elation. It's as though I could fly, almost, and I get very tense before I've told the truth—hard. Then I sit down at the desk and get going with it.

INTERVIEWER

What is the quality of feeling when you're writing?

SEXTON

Well, it's a beautiful feeling, even if it's hard work. When I'm writing, I know I'm doing the thing I was born to do.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any standard by which you judge whether to let an image remain in a poem, or be cut?

SEXTON

It's done with my unconscious. May it do me no ill.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTERVIEWER

You've said, "When I'm working away on a poem, I hunt for the truth... It might be a poetic truth, and not just a factual one." Can you comment on that?

SEXTON

Many of my poems are true, line by line, altering a few facts to get the story at its heart. In "The Double Image," the poem about my mother's death from cancer and the loss of my daughter, I don't mention that I had another child. Each poem has its own truth. Furthermore, in that poem, I only say that I was hospitalized twice, when in fact, I was hospitalized five times in that span of time. But then, poetic truth is not necessarily autobiographical. It is truth that goes beyond the immediate self, another life. I don't adhere to literal facts all the time; I make them up whenever needed. Concrete examples give a verisimilitude. I want the reader to feel, "Yes, yes, that's the way it is." I want them to feel as if they were touching me. I would alter any word, attitude, image or persona for the sake of a poem. As Yeats said, "I have lived many lives, I have been a slave and a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knee, and I have sat upon the knee of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again."

INTERVIEWER

There Yeats is talking about reincarnation.

SEXTON

So am I. It's a little mad, but I believe I am many people. When I am writing a poem, I feel I am the person who should have written it. Many times I assume these guises; I attack it the way a novelist might. Sometimes I become someone else and when I do, I believe, even in moments when I'm not writing the poem, that I am that person. When I wrote about the farmer's wife, I lived in my mind in Illinois; when I had the illegitimate child, I nursed it—in my mind—and gave it back and traded life. When I gave my lover back to his wife, in my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mind, I grieved and saw how ethereal and unnecessary I had been. When I was Christ, I felt like Christ. My arms hurt, I desperately wanted to pull them in off the Cross. When I was taken down off the Cross, and buried alive, I sought solutions; I hoped they were Christian solutions.

INTERVIEWER

What prompted you to write "In the Deep Museum," which recounts what Christ could have felt if he were still alive in the tomb? What led you to even deal with such a subject?

SEXTON

I'm not sure. I think it was an unconscious thing. I think I had a kind of feeling Christ was speaking to me and telling me to write that story... the story he hadn't written. I thought to myself, this would be the most awful death. The Cross, the Crucifixion which I so deeply believe in has almost become trite, and that there was a more humble death that he might have had to seek for love's sake, because his love was the greatest thing about him—not his death.

INTERVIEWER

Are you a believing non-believer? Your poems, such as "The Division of Parts" and "With Mercy for the Greedy," suggest you would like to believe, indeed struggle to believe, but can't.

SEXTON

Yes. I fight my own impulse. There is a hard-core part of me that believes, and there's this little critic in me that believes nothing. Some people think I'm a lapsed Catholic.

INTERVIEWER

What was your early religious training?

SEXTON

Half-assed Protestant. My Nana came from a Protestant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

background with a very stern patriarchal father who had twelve children. He often traveled in Europe, and when he came back and brought nude statues into his house, the minister came to call and said, "You can't come to church if you keep these nude statues." So he said, "All right, I'll never come again." Every Sunday morning he read the Bible to his twelve children for two hours, and they had to sit up straight and perfect. He never went to church again.

INTERVIEWER

Where do you get the "juice" for your religious poetry?

SEXTON

I found when I was bringing up my children, that I could answer questions about sex easily. But I had a very hard time with the questions about God and death. It isn't resolved in my mind to this day.

INTERVIEWER

Are you saying then that questions from your children are what prompted you to think about these poems—that doesn't sound quite right.

SEXTON

It isn't. I have visions—sometimes ritualized visions—that come to me of God, or of Christ, or of the Saints, and I feel that I can touch them almost... that they are part of me. It's the same "Everything that has been shall be again." It's reincarnation, speaking with another voice... or else with the Devil. If you want to know the truth, the leaves talk to me every June.

INTERVIEWER

How long do your visions last? What are they like?

SEXTON

That's impossible to describe. They could last for six months, six minutes or six hours. I feel very much in touch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with things after I've had a vision. It's somewhat like the beginning of writing a poem; the whole world is very sharp and well-defined, and I'm intensely alive, like I've been shot full of electric volts.

INTERVIEWER

Do you try to communicate this to other people when you feel it?

SEXTON

Only through the poems, no other way. I refuse to talk about it, which is why I'm having a hard time now.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any real difference between a religious vision and a vision when you're mad?

SEXTON

Sometimes, when you're mad, the vision—I don't call them visions really—when you're mad, they're silly and out of place, whereas if it's a so-called mystical experience, you've put everything in its proper place. I've never talked about my religious experiences with anyone, not a psychiatrist, not a friend, not a priest, not anyone. I've kept it very much to myself—and I find this very difficult, and I'd just as soon leave it, if you please.

INTERVIEWER

A poem like "The Division of Parts" has direct reference to your mother's dying. Did those excruciating experiences of watching someone close to you disintegrate from cancer force you to confront your own belief in God or religion?

SEXTON

Yes, I think so. The dying are slowly being rocked away from us and wrapped up into death, that eternal place. And one looks for answers and is faced with demons and visions. Then one comes up with God. I don't mean the ritualized Protestant God, who is such a goody-goody... but the martyred saints, the crucified man...

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTERVIEWER

Are you saying that when confronted with the ultimate question, death, that your comfort comes, even though watered-down, from the myths and fables of religion?

SEXTON

No myth or fable ever gave me any solace, but my own inner contact with the heroes of the fables, as you put it, my very closeness to Christ. In one poem about the Virgin Mary, "For the Year of the Insane," I believed that I was talking to Mary, that her lips were upon my lips; it's almost physical ... as in many of my poems. I become that person.

INTERVIEWER

But is it the fact in your life of someone you know dying that forces you into a vision?

SEXTON

No, I think it's my own madness.

INTERVIEWER

Are you more lucid, in the sense of understanding life, when you are mad?

SEXTON

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think that's so?

SEXTON

Pure gift.

INTERVIEWER

I asked you, are you a believing disbeliever. When something happens like a death, are you pushed over the brink of disbelieving into believing?

SEXTON

For a while, but it can happen without a death. There are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little deaths in life, too—in your own life—and at that point, sometimes you are in touch with strange things, otherworldly things.

INTERVIEWER

You have received a great deal of fan mail from Jesuits and other clergy. Do any of them interpret what you write as blasphemy?

SEXTON

No. They find my work very religious, and take my books on retreats, and teach my poems in classes.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you feel that most of your critics ignore this strain of religious experience in your poetry?

SEXTON

I think they tackle the obvious things, without delving deeper. They are more shocked by the other, whereas I think in time to come people will be more shocked by my mystical poetry than by my so-called confessional poetry.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps your critics, in time to come, will associate the suffering in your confessional poetry with the kind of sufferers you take on in your religious poetry.

SEXTON

You've summed it up perfectly. Thank you for saying that. That ragged Christ, that sufferer, performed the greatest act of confession, and I mean with his body. And I try to do that with words.

INTERVIEWER

Many of your poems deal with memories of suffering. Very few of them deal with memories that are happy ones. Why do you feel driven to write more about pain?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEXTON

That's not true about my last book, which deals with joy. I think I've dealt with unhappy themes because I've lived them. If I haven't lived them, I've invented them.

INTERVIEWER

But surely there were also happy moments, joyous, euphoric moments in those times as well.

SEXTON

Pain engraves a deeper memory.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any poems you wouldn't read in public?

SEXTON

No. As a matter of fact, I sing "Cripples and Other Stories" with my combo to a Nashville rhythm.

INTERVIEWER

What is your combo?

SEXTON

It's called "Her Kind"—after one of my poems. One of my students started putting my poems to music—he's a guitarist and then we got an organist, a flutist and a drummer. We call our music "Chamber Rock." We've been working on it and giving performances for about a year. It opens up my poems in a new way, by involving them in the sound of rock music, letting my words open up to sound that can be actually heard, giving a new dimension. And it's quite exciting for me to hear them that way.

INTERVIEWER

Do you enjoy giving a reading?

SEXTON

It takes three weeks out of your life. A week before it hap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pens, the nervousness begins and it builds up to the night of the reading, when the poet in you changes into a performer. Readings take so much out of you, because they are a reliving of the experience, that is, they are happening all over again. I am an actress in my own autobiographical play. Then there is the love... When there is a coupling of the audience and myself, when they are really with me, and the Muse is with me, I'm not coming alone.

INTERVIEWER

Can you ever imagine America as a place where thousands of fans flock to a stadium to hear a poet, as they do in Russia?

SEXTON

Someday, perhaps. But our poets seem to be losing touch. People flock to Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, the Beatles—these are the popular poets of the English-speaking world. But I don't worry about popularity; I'm too busy.

INTERVIEWER

At first your poetry was a therapeutic device. Why do you write now?

SEXTON

I write because I'm driven to—it's my bag. Though after every book, I think there'll never be another one. That's the end of that. Good-by, good-by.

INTERVIEWER

And what advice would you give to a young poet?

SEXTON

Be careful who your critics are. Be specific. Tell almost the whole story. Put your ear close down to your soul and listen hard.

INTERVIEWER

Louis Simpson criticised your poetry saying, "A poem titled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Menstruation at Forty' was the straw that broke this camel's back." Is it only male critics who balk at your use of the biological facts of womanhood?

SEXTON

I haven't added up all the critics and put them on different teams. I haven't noticed the gender of the critic especially. I talk of the life-death cycle of the body. Well, women tell time by the body. They are like clocks. They are always fastened to the earth, listening for its small animal noises. Sexuality is one of the most normal parts of life. True, I get a little uptight when Norman Mailer writes that he screws a woman anally. I like Allen Ginsberg very much and when he writes about the ugly vagina, I feel awful. That kind of thing doesn't appeal to me. So I have my limitations, too. Homosexuality is all right with me. Sappho was beautiful. But when someone hates another person's body and somehow violates it—that's the kind of thing I mind.

INTERVIEWER

What do you feel is the purpose of poetry?

SEXTON

As Kafka said about prose, "A book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us." And that's what I want from a poem. A poem should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us.

INTERVIEWER

How would you apply the Kafka quote to your new book, *Love Poems*?

SEXTON

Well, have you ever seen a sixteen-year-old fall in love? The axe for the frozen sea becomes imbedded in her. Or have you ever seen a woman get to be forty and never have any love in her life? What happens to her when she falls in love? The axe for the frozen sea.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTERVIEWER

Some people wonder how you can write about yourself, completely ignoring the great issues of the times, like the Vietnam War or the civil rights crisis.

SEXTON

People have to find out who they are before they can confront national issues. The fact that I seldom write about public issues in no way reflects my personal opinion. I am a pacifist. I sign petitions, etc. However, I am not a polemicist. "The Fire Bombers"—that's a new poem—is about wanton destruction, not about Vietnam, specifically; when Robert Kennedy was killed, I wrote about an assassin. I write about human emotions; I write about interior events, not historical ones. In one of my love poems, I say that my lover is unloading bodies from Vietnam. If that poem is read in a hundred years, people will have to look up the war in Vietnam. They will have mixed it up with the Korean or God knows what else. One hopes it will be history very soon. Of course, I may change. I could use the specifics of the war for a backdrop against which to reveal experience, and it would be just as valid as the details I am known by. As for the civil rights issue, I mentioned that casually in a poem, but I don't go into it. I think it's a major issue. I think many of my poems about the individual who is dispossessed, who must play slave, who cries "Freedom Now," "Power Now," are about the human experience of being black in this world. A black emotion can be a white emotion. It is a crisis for the individual as well as the nation. I think I've been writing black poems all along, wearing my white mask. I'm always the victim... but no longer!

—BARBARA KEVLES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes on Contributors

Ted Berrigan's most recent book is *In the Early Morning Rain* (Cape Goliard).

James Blake's letters in this issue are selected from *The Joint*, recently published by Doubleday–Paris Review Editions.

Michael Brownstein's three stories in this issue are included in *Brainstorms*, published in May by Bobbs–Merrill. A collection of poems, *26 Pictures*, will be published by Grape Press.

Keith Cohen has written a novel, *The Balustrade*.

Scott Cohen's book, *Actual Size*, was published by Arif Press.

Jack Collom is the editor of *the*, a magazine.

Jim Dine's book, *Poems & Drawings*, will be published by März Verlag, Frankfurt.

David Henderson's book of poems, *De Mayor of Harlem*, has been published by Dutton.

Anselm Hollo's most recent book is *Mays* (Cape Goliard/Grossman).

Barbara Kevles has been published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *New York*, *Show*, and *Film Culture*.

John Koethe is the author of *Blue Veins*.

Mark Lancaster's paintings are shown in London at the Rowan Gallery.

Frank Lima's poems in this issue are from a new book, *Underground With the Oriole*, to be published by Dutton.

Harry Mathews is the author of *The Conversions* and *Tlooth*. The first section of *The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium* appeared in *The Paris Review #51*.

Joyce Carol Oates' third novel, *Them*, was awarded the National Book Award in 1969.

Harris Schiff is the author of *Secret Clouds* (Angel Hair Books).

Lewis Warsh has recently published *Dreaming As One* (Corinth).

Paul West's excerpt in this issue, "Caliban's Filibuster," is from a novel of the same name recently published by Doubleday–Paris Review Editions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

available now from Paris or Flushing offices
BACK ISSUES OF THE PARIS REVIEW

No. 1	E. M. Forster Interview; William Styron, Terry Southern.*	$7.00
2	François Mauriac Interview; Richard Wilbur, Robert Bly, Blair Fuller.*	7.00
3	Graham Greene Interview; Evan S. Connell, Donald Hall.*	7.00
4	Irwin Shaw Interview; Terry Southern, Alfred Chester.	8.50
5	William Styron Interview; Samuel Beckett, Donald Hall.	8.50
6	Alberto Moravia Interview; Italo Calvino, Cecil Hemley.	6.00
7	Joyce Cary Interview; Picasso Portfolio; Mac Hyman, Evan S. Connell.	6.00
8	Ralph Ellison Interview; Louis Simpson, John Phillips, George P. Elliot.*	7.00
9	George Simenon Interview; Kenneth Tynan, Thom Gunn, James Wright.	5.00
10	James Thurber Interview; Evan S. Connell, Zygmunt Haupt.	5.00
11	Nelson Algren Interview; Jack Kerouac, Christopher Logue.	5.00
12	Faulkner Interview; Thom Gunn, Gina Berriault, W. S. Merwin.*	7.00
13	Dorothy Parker Interview; Jean Genet, Richard Yates.	4.50
14	Isak Dinesen and Françoise Sagan Interviews; Masson Portfolios.	6.00
15	Thornton Wilder Interview; Michaux, Terry Southern, Hughes Rudd.*	7.00
16	Robert Penn Warren and Truman Capote Interviews; Robert Bly.*	7.00
17	Frank O'Connor and Angus Wilson Interviews; John Wain, W. S. Merwin.	4.50
18	Ernest Hemingway Interview; Giacometti Portfolio; Philip Roth.	5.00
19	Henry Green Interview; Philip Roth, Niccolo Tucci, V. S. Naipaul.	4.50
20	James Jones Interview; Chagall Portfolio; Philip Roth.	4.50
21	T. S. Eliot Interview; N. Y. Artists; Terry Southern, Alexander Trocchi.	3.00
22	Lawrence Durrell Interview; William Styron James Dickey.	3.00
23	Aldous Huxley Interview; Malcolm Lowry, Charles G. Finney.	3.00
24	Boris Pasternak and Robert Frost Interviews; Gina Berriault.	3.50
25	Robert Lowell Interview; Hughes Rudd, X. J. Kennedy.	3.00
26	Marianne Moore and Ilya Ehrenburg Interviews; Malcolm Lowry, Mailer.	3.00
27	Mary McCarthy Interview; Harry Mathews, Robert Bly, Denise Levertov.	3.00
28	Pound and Henry Miller Interviews; Beckett, Borges, Alfred Chester.	2.00
29	Katherine Anne Porter Interview; Durrell-Miller Letters; Malcolm Lowry.	2.00
30	S. J. Perelman and Evelyn Waugh Interviews; Niccolo Tucci, 22 poets.	2.00
31	Norman Mailer and Celine Interviews; Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller.	2.00
32	Cocteau, Picasso and Wm. Carlos Williams Interviews; Charles Olson.	2.00
33	Lillian Hellman Interview; R. V. Cassill, Jeremy Larner, Robert Creeley.	2.00
34	De Beauvoir and Yevtushenko Interviews; Harry Mathews, Gary Snyder.	2.00
35	William Burroughs Interview; Irvin Faust, Leonard Gardner, Ron Padgett.	2.00
36	Saul Bellow Interview; William Styron, Robert Duncan, Barbara Guest.	2.00
37	Allen Ginsberg and Cendrars Interviews; Charles Olson, Gary Snyder.	3.00
38	Arthur Miller Interview; Brainard-Elmslie Portfolio; Rosalyn Drexler. "Lowry in England," James Salter, Leroi Jones.	2.00
39	Edward Albee and Harold Pinter Interviews; E. E. Cummings Letters.	2.00
40	Borges Interview; John Cage Diary; John Ashbery, James Schuyler.	2.00
41	Vladimir Nabokov Interview; Kenward Elmslie, Kenneth Koch, Philip Whalen, John Ashbery.	2.00
42	Conrad Aiken Interview; Ed Sanders, Four French Poets.	2.00
43	Jack Kerouac Interview; Ashbery-Schuyler collaboration; Francis Ponge.	1.50
44	Robert Creeley and Isaac Bashevis Singer Interviews; James Salter, Joseph Ceravolo, Diane di Prima.	1.50
45	John Updike Interview; Edward Hoagland Journal; Tom Veitch, Richard Brautigan, Bill Berkson, Ron Padgett, Frank O'Hara.	1.50
46	John Dos Passos Interview; Thomas M. Disch, Ted Berrigan, Kenneth Koch, Philip Whalen.	1.50
47	Robert Graves Interview; Ed Sanders, Robert Creeley, Tom Clark, Mitchell Sisskind.	1.50
48	John Steinbeck and E. B. White Interviews; Michael Brownstein.	1.50
49	Charles Olson Interview; Frank O'Hara, James Salter.	1.50
50	George Seferis Interview; John Ashbery, Jim Carroll, Kenward Elmslie, James Schuyler.	1.50
51	Pablo Neruda Interview; Harry Mathews, John Wieners, Michael McClure.	1.50

*Reprint Edition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED